# HAVING OUR SAY

## EXAMINING CAREER TRAJECTORIES OF BLACK MALE EDUCATORS IN P-12 EDUCATION

NNSTOY TEACHERSLEADING

University of Phoenix®

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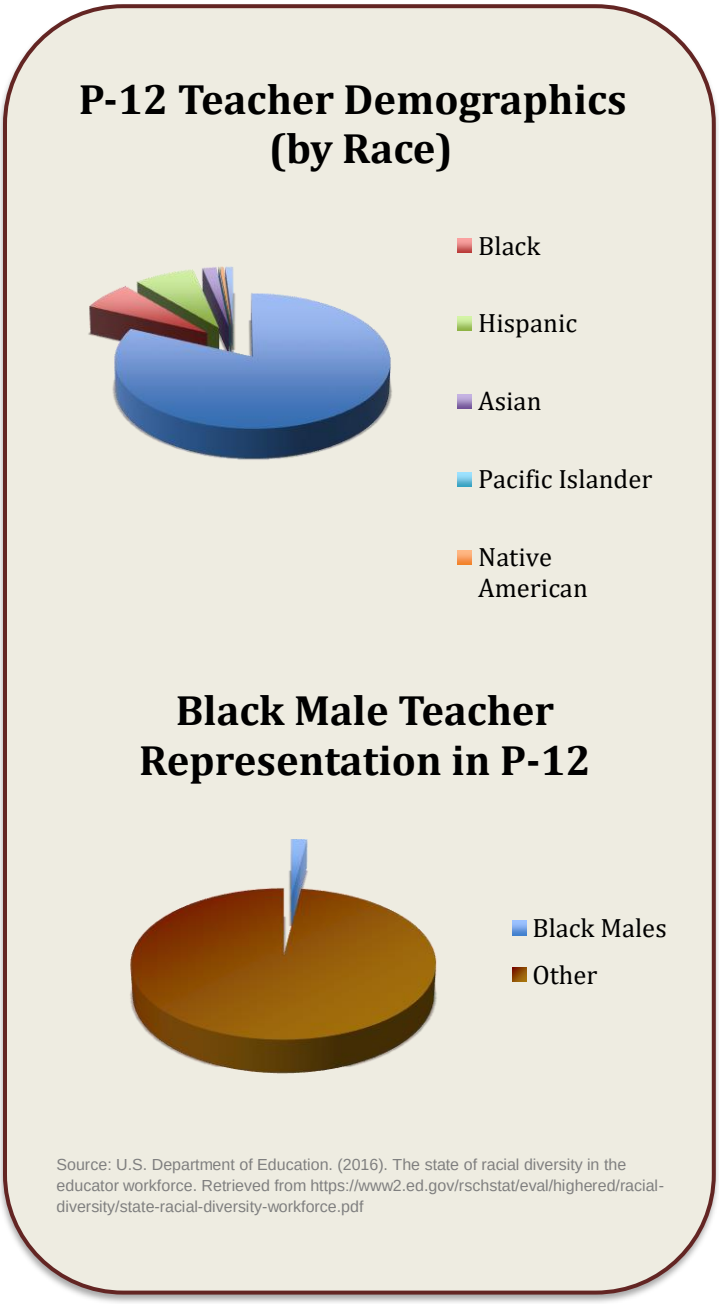
# Having Our Say:

## Examining the Career Trajectories of Black Male Educators in P-12 Education

BY DRS. KIMBERLY UNDERWOOD, DONNA SMITH, HILARY LUTZ-JOHNSON, JOY TAYLOR, & J. MEDGAR ROBERTS

## INTRODUCTION

Achieving a diverse and inclusive workforce within P-12 education is critical to ensure that students receive a robust, quality educational experience. However, overcoming the shortage of educators of color has been a major dilemma for our nation's schools for decades. And, despite students of color comprising over 50% of current classroom populations[2] and the United States Census Bureau's prediction that people of color will become the "majority-minority" in the overall United States population by 2043[1], these trends fail to correlate with representations of educators of color in P-12 education, especially for new cohorts of Black male teachers. In fact, according to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), male educators comprise only 23% of the public school workforce and, more troubling, Black male teachers represent less than 2% of the total teacher population.[2]




Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2016). The state of racial diversity in the educator workforce. Retrieved from https://www2.ed.gov/rschstat/eval/highered/racial-diversity/state-racial-diversity-workforce.pdf

Undoubtedly, the clarion call of all stakeholders within P-12 education should be seeking and retaining qualified and caring educators regardless of race or ethnicity. As such, race and ethnicity cannot be the sole factor in determining how teachers are recruited, hired, and promoted. However, there is an abundance of evidence to support the presence of diverse racial and ethnic demographics as necessary, influential factors in creating progressive school systems. Therefore, the diversification of P-12 schools should remain a key priority in current education reform strategies.

Through their goal of transforming the teaching profession and increasing the cadre of educators and administrators in P-12, the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY) has partnered with University of Phoenix (UOPX) to examine the current trajectories of Black male educators as they enter into and advance within school settings. Each year, NNSTOY recruits dynamic Black male teachers, P-12 administrators, and higher education professionals for participation in their year-long fellowship – the Outstanding Black Male Fellowship – and provides a forum for discussion of key issues relevant to the professional development and advancement of Black male educators in P-12 education. NNSTOY asserts, "Promoting teacher leadership means developing and empowering highly effective teachers to take a leadership role in innovation, collective capacity, and continuous improvement — in policy, practice, and advocacy."[3]

The content of this white paper will include a critical examination of the career trajectories of Black male educators from three perspectives: recruitment, retention, and mobility. Throughout this document, we have incorporated the insights, observations, and opinions of these dynamic fellows, using reflective quotes and personal narratives. Finally, this focused dialogue presents recommendations for future initiatives, models, and actions supporting Black males in education.

*"Promoting teacher leadership means developing and empowering highly effective teachers to take a leadership role in innovation, collective capacity, and continuous improvement — in policy, practice, and advocacy."* ~NNSTOY

# THE CRITICAL NATURE OF REPRESENTATION

Although the teaching profession has become slightly more diverse in recent years, Black male educators remain in high demand within our nation's P-12 schools—historically and currently dominated by White women. With the rapid growth of the minority youth population in classrooms, there is a greater need to diversify the teacher workforce.

While research findings vary surrounding the benefits of Black male representation within the teaching profession, there is an overarching level of agreement: The lack of Black males in teaching positions has serious implications for *all* students.

*"I'm in education to serve a specific purpose: to make an impact in my community… I make the conscious choice to stay focused and actively seek opportunities where I can initiate meaningful change."*

Black teachers, and Black male teachers in particular, have always been in the minority in school settings. Many students note the absence of Black male educator representation throughout their schooling.[4] Subsequently, many students may lose access to valuable insights and perspectives from this group and, for some, the vital and necessary interactions needed to develop and realize their own aspirations. A common assertion within the literature is one of cultural congruence and the advantages arising from homogeneous, cultural associations. Various studies suggest that Black students, especially, benefit from having a Black male teacher, as evinced by lower dropout rates, fewer disciplinary issues, more positive views of schooling, and better test scores. Evans and Leonard assert, "[a]lthough behaviors cannot be generalized, Black teachers are more likely to be familiar with the cultural nuances and vernacular of Black students and have the skills and ability to motivate them to learn."[5] When considering the gap in the number between Black students and Black teachers, researchers further postulate that Black teachers are more likely to be familiar with the cultural needs of Black students, thus creating a space for positive academic achievement to occur.[6] According to a joint study by American University, John Hopkins University, and the University of California-Davis, having just one Black teacher during elementary school reduced low-income male

*"At the end of the day, it's about us contributing to the next generation and making a difference for kids. That's what it's really about. When you look at society, a large percent of the population is represented by Black males… I'm not going to make the argument that you have to look like the kids in order to serve them, but it does help to have that additional means to build a relationship. It's about building an educational system that is designed to serve the children of our country in a way that is equitable, effective, and meaningful."*

students' probability of dropping out by 29%.[7] Research further suggests that, when provided with opportunities to engage with Black male teachers, Black male students had higher test scores and decreased instances of disciplinary actions.[8]

Additional research suggests the dearth of Black men in the teaching profession has negative implications for children of *all* races and the teaching profession as a whole.[9] Many researchers and theorists argue that the lack of a diversified teacher workforce continues to undermine egalitarianism within society through the reinforcement of persevering social inequalities and inequities. To underscore this point, Rivera and Plant postulate, through their research on the influence of Barack Obama's presidential campaign on other races, that the visibility of a Black male authority figure can dramatically decrease bias and prejudice in other races.[10]

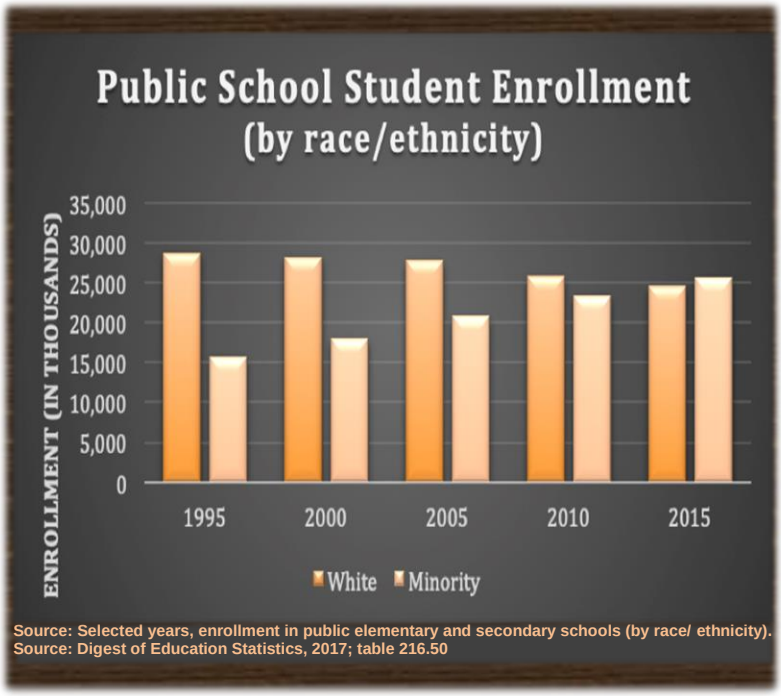
Regardless of the varying views of what makes the Black male educator important in the classroom, a common thread throughout all of the narratives is the resounding acknowledgment of the ubiquitous need to increase Black male educator representations in school settings.

*"I'm here to help students grow, regardless of who they are and where they came from… I'm going to help you do better. That's my position as a Black male educator."*

# THE LEAKY CLASSROOM PIPELINE

As school districts transition to majority-minority student populations, graduate and undergraduate teacher preparation programs are increasingly challenged—with special emphases on recruitment and retention efforts—to provide P-12 classrooms with diverse, qualified teachers. Teacher preparation programs must also ensure that their teacher candidates are capable of delivering high-quality teaching and learning experiences to all students. Unfortunately, the recruitment of qualified Black male educators continues to be a long-standing challenge for teacher preparation programs across the nation.

Scholars suggest that the number of Black males who enter the teaching profession is often impacted by the decreasing number of Black males who finish high school. Black students, as a whole, are not taking the rigorous classes needed to prepare them to be teachers and continue to be marginalized and blocked from opportunities for academic achievement, to include gifted programming and advanced placement courses.[11] Additional factors, including low graduation rates of Black males,[12] disproportionate rates of behavioral discipline and suspensions,[13] and the negative views of teaching as a profession,[14] have all been cited as major factors influencing the low representation of Black male students in teacher preparation programs.



Source: Selected years, enrollment in public elementary and secondary schools (by race/ ethnicity).
Source: Digest of Education Statistics, 2017; table 216.50

Although the 2019 National Center for Education report, *Status and Trends in the Education of Racial and Ethnic Minority Groups*, notes a promising increase in the numbers of Black students attending colleges and universities, (from 11.7% in 2000 to 13.7% in 2016),[15] this upsurge has not substantially contributed to any notable growth in the number of Black males entering teacher preparation programs. In fact, the number of Black teachers *decreased* within the same time frame (from eight percent to seven percent).[16] Moreover, a recent study exploring the reasons why Black males choose not to

consider the teaching profession as a viable career option determined that negative perceptions about the teaching profession are often established before they leave high school. In their study of Black male high school students, Goings and Bianco specifically noted that the decisions of these participants to bypass teaching were largely influenced by their personal experiences with stereotyping, over-disciplining, microaggressions, and lack of support within P-12 school interactions.[17]

*"As a profession, you don't hear educators themselves talking about our profession as something that they like to do. When talking to kids about what they can become, we rarely say, "What about being a teacher?" We're always telling them they can be lawyers or doctors… rarely teachers."*

For Black males who choose to become teachers, difficulties navigating within teacher preparation programs frequently become contentious barriers to teacher certification. Culturally-biased standardized assessments often impede the progression of potential teachers of color. Within their summary report surrounding racial achievement on their Praxis I teacher licensure assessment–currently required in the majority of states and territories–the Educational Testing Service noted an African American performance rate 35% lower than White counterparts.[18] In addition to challenges with standardized testing, instances of racism, marginalization, and isolation often have serious implications for Black students, resulting in the temporary or permanent departure from higher education at greater rates than their counterparts.[19]

Although recent statistics demonstrate a larger number of Black students entering higher education, Black males face major challenges in retention and graduation from institutions of higher education overall. In fact, Black males represent only eight percent of all undergraduates in higher education.[20] Amongst all undergraduate education majors, 42% of Black students attain a bachelor's degree within six years, while 73% of Whites do so.[21] Given the already low number of Black males represented in colleges and universities, this statistic paints a daunting picture of the numbers of Black males represented within teacher preparation at these institutions and who are likely to enter the teaching force through the 'traditional' teacher preparation pipeline.

## RECENT DIVERSIFICATION EFFORTS

The Black male teacher recruitment agenda continues to be a necessary topic in educational reform. The creation of several grassroots, Black male teacher recruitment initiatives has heightened the visibility of this issue. During the Obama administration, the U.S. Department of Education introduced the *Teach Campaign*, noting a hopeful five percent increase of Black males in the teaching profession by 2020.[22] Under this initiative, former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan targeted Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), such as Morehouse and Howard, in order to shed light on this critical gap in the P-12 workforce and champion teaching as a viable career option.[23] While this clarion call did not lead to the lofty, anticipated increase in Black male diversification in classrooms, it did encourage the development of various local programs to create additional strategies to recruit Black males.

***"Grow Your Own" Initiatives.*** Grounded in the grassroots organizing tradition, policymakers, educators, and higher education administrators noted several developing and emerging programs aimed at preparing and mentoring Black males for service in teaching. For instance, Clemson University implemented the widely-adopted *Call Me MISTER* (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) program, with a particular focus on Black male college graduates, to increase the pool of diverse teachers from diverse backgrounds in low-performing elementary schools.[24]

Additionally, *Teach Tomorrow in Oakland* (a partnership between the Oakland Mayor's office and Oakland Unified School District) emerged as a promising teacher recruitment and development model aimed at placing classroom teachers who reflect the ethnic and cultural demographics of their city, by recruiting from the local community.[25] While such programs have received numerous and well-deserved accolades, a critical examination of the number of potential Black male educators in the last decade demonstrates that the attrition rates for this group continue to disproportionately exceed those of White teachers, suggesting that remedies beyond recruitment are necessary.

***Minority Serving Institutions.*** Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have served as another viable option for alleviating the shortage of Black male representation in teaching ranks. Although HBCUs comprise only four percent of the nation's colleges and universities, the impact of these institutions is

indisputable. HBCU teacher preparation programs graduate 50% of African American teachers with bachelor's degrees. In many urban and rural settings that have HBCUs, these institutions furnish high percentages of teachers to the local school district. In addition, many HBCUs have graduate degree offerings in educational administration and also prepare significant numbers of principals for local school districts. As such, HBCUs have served as a vital resource in diversifying America's mostly White teaching force.[26]

A model at Howard University showed extensive potential as a national prototype for the recruitment, preparation, and placement of African American male teachers in high-need schools. The *Ready to Teach Program* served as a nationwide, collaborative effort led by the Howard University School of Education in partnership with five urban school districts. Supported by a $2.1 million dollar grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the program recruited African American males (and other underrepresented populations) and prepared participants for a career as a P-12 teacher through their College of Education.[27] While this program was deemed highly successful, this promising model is currently no longer in operation due to a lack of continued federal funding.[28]

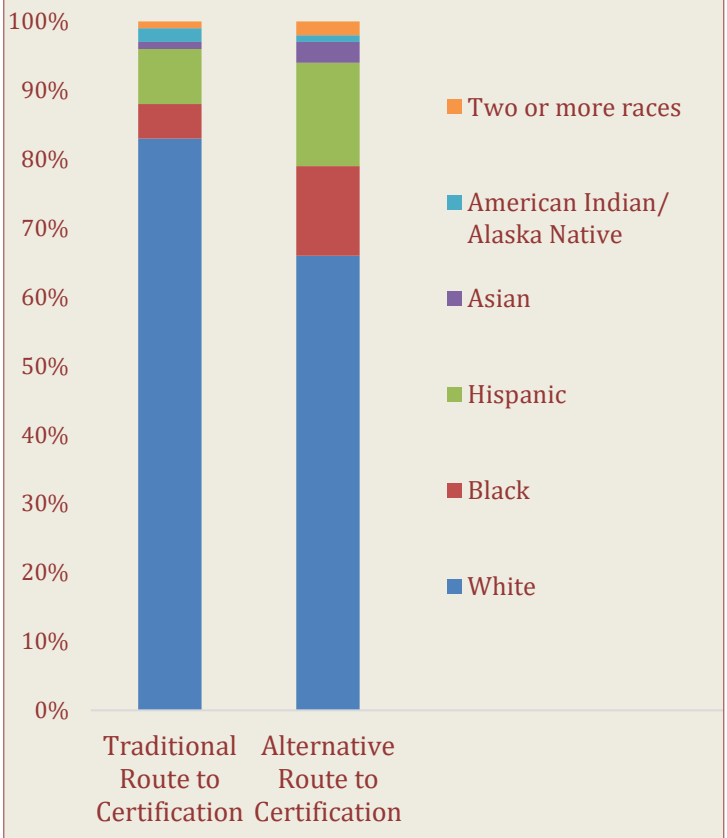
***Alternative Routes to Certification.*** In an effort to diversify classrooms across the nation, many universities, school districts, and private entities offer alternative certification programs. These programs, some of which allow participants to teach while completing the requirements, were implemented in the early 1980s to attract a fresh pool of prospective teacher candidates holding a bachelor's degree and seeking entry into the teaching profession without having to navigate through four-year, traditional teacher preparation programs.[29] This collection of teachers often serves in hard-to-staff schools or teach high-need subject areas, such as mathematics and the sciences.[30]

For example, through the Departments of Defense and Education, *Troops to Teachers* provides funding to members of the armed forces who wish to start a teaching career following military service. Participation requirements include the possession of a baccalaureate or advanced degree. As such, this program has assisted over 17,000 military members to enter P-12 classrooms, many through alternative certification programs.[31]

According to the U.S. Department of Education, approximately 18% of public school teachers entered P-12 classrooms

through an alternative certification program.[32] When dissecting this percentage by race and gender, a higher percentage of both Blacks and males enter the education profession through this route.

**Public Elementary and Secondary School Teachers: Route to Certification (by race)**




SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, National Teacher and Principal Survey (NTPS), "Public School Teacher Data File," 2015–16. See Digest of Education Statistics 2017, table 209.24.

As each state determines its own requirements for its approved alternative certification programs, these programs have produced varying results in relation to teacher preparedness and retention. Following reports of mixed results of alternatively certified teachers' overall performance and effectiveness, policymakers at the state and federal levels have embarked in ongoing efforts to create more rigor and standardization within these programs.[33] While alternative certification continues to serve as a viable pathway for Black males into our nation's classrooms, unfortunately, statistics suggest that those entering through alternative certification pathways are also more likely to leave the classroom.[34]

It remains uncontested that efforts, such as these, have positively assisted in diversifying the pool of qualified, dynamic, Black male teachers. However, the pervasive issue of underrepresentation continues to plague those who seek to increase the presence of Black males in classrooms across the nation. In retrospect, statistics strongly suggest the continued need for comprehensive strategies for diversification within the teaching profession.

# EXPERIENCES AS A BLACK MALE EDUCATOR

Irrespective of the certification pathway, Black male teachers often note similarities within their experiences once entering school settings. Overall, teachers of color are often recruited to teach in schools serving large populations of students of color, many plagued with a lack of resources and high teacher turnover rates. Though not suggesting this as an absolute, NNSTOY Fellows relate inequitable teaching conditions, the lack of peer and leadership support, unrealistic accountability expectations, and scarce resources as common experiences when entering a new school setting.

Within the research on Black male educators, there is an immense amount of scholarship focused on teacher preparation, student impact and influence, and recruiting Black males into school settings. While these aforementioned areas remain critical to guiding Black males to the teaching profession, there remains scant empirical literature focused on the experiences of Black male teachers once they enter the classroom setting.[35] As such, the voices of the 2018 cohort of NNSTOY Outstanding Black Male Educators fellows, while strategically infused throughout the entirety of this paper, are especially reflected within this section to echo the varied, yet often similar experiences of Black male teachers within school settings.

***Socialization.*** Organizational socialization is the experience of learning and adjusting to organizational standards and norms that relative newcomers encounter following the selection and hiring process.[36] It is through this socialization process that employees learn, not only the parameters of their new job titles, but the rules and mores of the organizational culture and their role within the institution. Although socialization occurs during the many stages of an individual's career, the initial period of socialization upon entry into the organizational culture is critical, as this is when employees develop their understanding of the organization and their identities as new members.[37]

Upon entering school settings, specifically as new teachers, Black males are simultaneously faced with socialization tasks of understanding their role within the organizational culture and navigating the assimilation process within the school. The primary role assumed by this group is that of the classroom teacher. However, the juxtaposition of balancing assigned roles and

tasks, assimilating within existing groups, all while crafting their identities as Black men within settings where they are clearly the minority, often poses immediate challenges for this group to navigate effectively. Dichotomies within the perceptions of others and misguided understandings of the true purpose of their existence in schools can further complicate their socialization process. The stark reality remains that much of their success hinges on the successful acclimation to a world where they are sorely underrepresented.

***Role Delineation.*** Early within the socialization cycle, Black male teachers often find themselves in positions of being the only or one of a select few males of color, resulting in the hyper-awareness of their representation within school settings. Limited representation on the teaching staff often has unintended consequences for this population, including challenges with others surrounding the acknowledgment of their value, consideration of their opinions, and the navigation of professional relationships with both fellow teachers and administrators. As with many underrepresented demographic groups in organizational settings, the limited number of Black males may result in feelings of "otherness," alienation, and isolation.

*"Oftentimes, Black male educators in schools operate in silos that are only occasionally broken by the casual fist bump or the "What's up?"... Cross-collaboration is one of the ways we can help with the retention and advancement of Black male educators in the field."*

John King, Jr. (former United States Secretary of Education) wrote an extensive article detailing the "invisible tax" often ascribed to Black male educators. This tax includes serving as the expert on diversity-related matters, and being viewed as a "father figure"–including mentoring and disciplining children of color, especially Black males.[38] For some, these additional responsibilities can have a detrimental impact on teacher effectiveness, especially if they become a recurring distraction or deterrent within classroom instruction.

*"As Black male educators, we sometimes hear we are worth our weight in gold… So, it is tempting for us to be all things to all people. The problem with that is, when we start siphoning off all of our energy into all of these different streams, our core function to help kids begins to unintentionally descend as a priority."*

An emerging strand of scholarship has raised valid questions about the presumption of Black male teachers as ideal disciplinarians for urban Black youth. Of specific concern is the disproportionate responsibility often delegated to Black male teachers, who are viewed as resources for successfully navigating issues of student misconduct. Brockenbrough (2015) noted that the over-reliance on Black male disciplinary talents revealed a disregard for the teacher's own workload and failed to recognize his strengths in other aspects of teaching.[39] Unfortunately, in many instances, there is a recurring perception that colleagues and administrators view them as "disciplinarians first and teachers second." Compounding this dilemma, Black male teachers often state that their decision to teach in hard-to-staff schools encourages the detrimental impact on their reputation as enforcers, not educators.

*"Black males are often brought in to be the disciplinarian. When other teachers have disruptive children, especially children of color, they bring them to me. So, there is the recurring thought that, when something challenging happens on the campus, I am the 'go to' guy. The perception is that children of color or disruptive students are likely to respect the male educator. It makes me question how others perceive my value as an educator…"*

In addition to the role of de facto disciplinarian, Black male educators are often cast in the role of primary mentor of students of color, specifically perceived by some as the solution for effectively molding young Black students. Although there are notable benefits within these associations, unspoken expectations surrounding this additional responsibility place an unfair and inequitable burden on many Black male teachers to accept full responsibility for the successful social development and academic achievement of this specific population of students.

*"If I'm a Black male educator who is not conscious of the perceptual restraints on me, I can think that my role is to command and control rather than relate and educate. Yet, I think that is a trap that I've seen so many of my fellow Black male educators fall into because they believe, "If I keep kids under control and if I make sure that they are not 'wilding out,' then I'm ok." But it's not about that... Being a Black male educator, principal, professor, or consultant is about helping kids relate and understand what's going on in the world."*

***Interactions with Colleagues and Administrators.*** Often cognizant of the social and cultural implications of their status, many educators of color experience ongoing frustrations with encounters of pre-existing generalizations and consternation over being singled out as spokesmen for all people of color. There is often a notable contradiction in perceptions of Black male teachers in that they are considered to be both villains and saviors.[40] Within mainstream society, this group is often unfairly and inaccurately portrayed as being unemployed, absent from their families, poorly educated, and likely to engage in criminal activities.[41] By contrast, Black male teachers are often characterized as "superheroes" who have overcome these stereotypes.[42] However, within this exceptionality, Black male educators are still often more closely scrutinized and more likely subjected to unfair or inequitable treatment within their school districts which results in a continuous cycle of resistance-accommodation to historic, marginalized norms and practices as a way in which to survive the profession.[43]

*"As a Black male, you operate in a system of privilege as a male and also marginalization as someone who is Black.... It's so hard being the only one or one of a few in a building or in a system, especially given that you then become 'all things Black.'"*

Black males have noted various challenges as they navigate the teaching environment and, due to their hypervisibility as Black males in spaces historically dominated by other demographics, they may experience "less than welcoming" working environments. Black males are often challenged to navigate spaces where their identity and purpose are misunderstood or decisively disregarded by others within the school setting.

*"As an administrator, while there was recognition of the value of having (Black males) in the building and to have us as a part of the educational environment and experience, I still don't think there is a true acknowledgment of the benefits of having us around or the skills we hold. It is very much a marginalized experience; it is a situation of, "you can come into the room but we're not going to let you really be deeply a part of the conversation."*

*"Black male teachers have to be unapologetically Black…. I feel others are intimidated by my presence. Although people will have perceptions about you, the challenge is not letting others define who you are."*

The few studies conducted on the perceptions of Black male teachers indicate that these educators experience microaggressions and biases from others at a higher rate than other demographic groups in educational settings at all levels. For instance, as detailed by NNSTOY Fellows, microaggressions and micro-insults are often presented as compliments, while containing unspoken messages that they are somehow not qualified to teach or are perceived as exceptions within their race.

*"I've always had an extensive vocabulary and people have said, "You talk so White" or "When I close my eyes, I don't see a Black person." In reflection, if you choose to close your eyes in response to my presence, you don't see any person."*

The research focused on African American males in mainstream, middle-class society found that there are subtle, wide-spread, societal perceptions that African American males are somehow 'less than.'[44] Being the single representative of a race and/or gender in any working situation can present the challenges of being labeled as "other" or different, and being subjected to the (mis)perceptions of others, rather than having one's thoughts and perspectives considered and valued, and receiving fair treatment as member of the organization.[45] The cumulative effect of these factors may significantly contribute to why so few Black males choose education as a career initially and why so many leave after a short time in the classroom.

*"My struggle is questioning, "Do I appear intimidating or am I not assertive enough?" I am always trying to balance myself in between those two worlds, as a Black man. It is exhausting… I'm always trying to find this area where I have to walk this tight rope by not being 'too Black' around certain teachers and not being 'Black enough' around others."*

***Building Inclusivity.*** Equitable and consistent applications of support, discipline, and decision making are positive efforts correlated with increased retention of teachers of color and job satisfaction.[46] Schools in which teachers enjoy classroom autonomy, feel valued as a member, and are placed into decision-making leadership roles are more likely to retain more teachers, irrespective of race and gender.[47] Often, Black male teachers are characterized as a "pedagogically homogenous" group and there is no recognition that each one brings a different interpretation and expression of masculinity to the classroom.[48] School leaders must embrace these dynamics of difference and begin to appreciate how Black male

teachers connect with their diverse and complex student populations. Additionally, leaders need to develop and build upon this cultural knowledge to encourage the transformation of Black males' teaching practices in meaningful and relevant ways.

*"I don't feel there is intentional support for Black male educators. I believe there are times when I'm included because it's good to keep up appearances. Yet, people need to get to know me for who I am, things I have accomplished, and tasks I would like to do. I feel like I am here but not intentionally included in the opportunities that create meaningful change and have an impact."*

Retention of this group can also increase by providing opportunities for leadership roles, advancement, and autonomy, as well as working conditions that support recognition of professionalism and respect. One way school leaders can effectively encourage Black male educator retention rates is through advocacy networking and promoting their roles in the district. Further, leaders should consider effective ways to foster organic mentoring relationships for Black male teachers.

Absent long-term, sustainable mentoring opportunities, Black male teachers experience the highest rates of attrition in both urban and rural school settings.[49] According to Wong, in-service teachers are better served by professional teachers/coaches who are good at their jobs, share professional knowledge, and show novice teachers how to perform the various tasks associated with teaching.[50] We further posit the importance of identifying culturally competent teachers for this important task, as homogeneous influences may result in exclusionary practices as well as implicit and explicit biases that are counter-productive and detrimental to the mentoring process. Therefore, to encourage greater teacher diversity within our nation's schools school leaders are tasked with the critical imperative to develop and to foster inclusive climates that are conducive to mentoring and coaching Black male teachers.

*"I definitely support the idea of meaningful mentoring and coaching. It is essential to building systems to support the teachers that you have, in addition to building pipelines to get more teachers. The pipe line does not end, just because you were hired…"*

# LEAVING THE CLASSROOM

Given historic efforts of policymakers and school leadership to diversify the teaching profession–with a keen focus on recruiting Black males–one might assume that similar levels of attention would be focused on retaining and maintaining adequate representations of Black males in schools and across districts. However, there are few current initiatives (such as the NNSTOY Outstanding Black Male Fellowship project) concentrated on retention and advancement within the profession. Future research and initiatives focused on teacher retention are critical; while the overall teacher attrition rate has remained fairly steady at around eight percent,[51] this statistic is far less encouraging for teachers of color.

***Exiting the Classroom.*** The exodus of teachers of color from the classroom, especially Black males, negatively impacts the overall educational system. Teacher turnover exacerbates the persistent problem of having little to no Black male representation within schools. As such, schools often resort to hiring inexperienced and under-prepared teachers, eliminating or reducing classes, or increasing class sizes, all of which can adversely affect both teachers and students.[52]

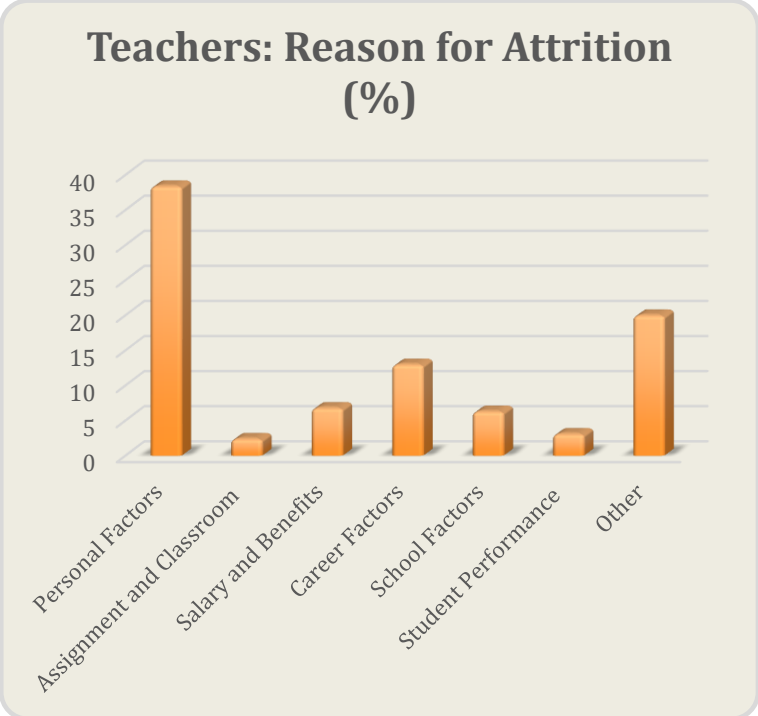
The latest NCES School and Staffing Survey[53] and Teacher Follow-Up Survey[54] provide some concerning statistics:

- Alternatively certified teachers were 25% more likely to leave their schools or the profession;
- Mathematics, special education, and science teachers were more likely to leave their schools or the profession than other subject-matter teachers; and
- Teachers noting a lack of support from school leaders were twice as likely to leave their schools or the profession than their counterparts.

While these factors likely pose a high level of concern for many, additional factors may specifically contribute to the exodus of Black male teachers from the classroom. Teachers of color are more likely than their counterparts to work in underfunded, hard-to-staff schools, resulting in an increased likelihood of leaving the classroom and/or P-12 entirely.[55] Moreover, the lack of classroom autonomy and inability to contribute to decision making within school settings are often cited by teachers of color as a determinant to leave the profession.[56]

Low pay is another prominent factor impacting the retention of highly qualified Black male teachers. When compared to other degreed professions, the lower than the average salary of teachers may also serve as a point of contention. According to the most recent NCES National Teacher and Principal Survey, 45% of national teacher participants agreed with the statement, "If I could get a higher paying job, I'd leave teaching as soon as possible."[57]

Overall, teachers who voluntarily left the teaching profession provided a variety of reasons for their exodus. In the latest NCES Teacher Follow-Up Survey, reasons for leaving P-12 education included dissatisfaction with school conditions, minimal opportunities for advancement, better career opportunities, retirement, and personal reasons.[58]




Source: National Center for Education Statistics (2014), *Teacher Attrition and Mobility*. Retrieved from https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2014/2014077.pdf

***Advancement into Administration.*** Educational leadership that reflects the cultural and ethnic composition within society is important for *all* students. A recent NCES survey notes approximately 30% of teachers who leave the classroom move into a position with administration.[59] Yet, African American males are often passed over for principalships and superintendencies or are consigned to the ranks of coachs, disciplinarians, or other non-curricular positions.[60]

While there is a robust body of literature surrounding the recruitment of Black male teachers, there is scant research surrounding the importance of supporting the advancement of the Black male teacher into positions of leadership, such as curriculum leader and principal. Principals of color can positively contribute to student levels of comfort, motivation, and achievement in schools with high populations of students of color. Few efforts of scale have been mounted that build on existing minority teacher pipeline programs and press for greater diversity in principalships and superintendencies.

While non-Hispanic, White teachers comprise approximately 82% of the P-12 workforce, public school principals also reflect a racially homogenous group, with 78% identifying as

White.[61] The proportion of individuals in these roles remains an inequitable representation of the percentage of enrolled P-12 students either by race or societal racial demographic distributions. The same pattern holds true for the superintendencies, as less than three percent of the nation's nearly 15,000 superintendents are Black.[62] The under-representation of Blacks and other racial minority groups within the P-12 administrative workforce, comparable to their representation in the wider population, may serve as an indicator of intentional or consequential racism and inequitable employment practices within the profession. There is a need to increase diversity and representation of school leaders comparable to that of the overall student population and wider community populations. To fully explore the presence of racism in hiring and promotion practices, it is important to first understand the different levels at which racism manifests: individual, institutional, and cultural. Such racism may be due to structural inhibitors, racial microaggressions, and invisible selection criteria that people of color encounter as they seek to progress their career ambitions.[63]

*"Increasing the number of Black teachers at all levels across elementary and secondary education would allow more Black male educators to feel that it is okay that they "leave the classroom" without fear of leaving their students without Black male teachers in the classroom."*

# Reflections of a Black Male Educator

*Philosophically speaking, the role of the Black male educator is to provide a positive model, not only for Black males but for all students (and for the faculty, administration, parent body, and community, if I'm being real.) But certainly, for our Black youth, Black male educators provide alternative narratives to the negative images of Black males as criminals and convicts, or the overrepresented images of success through sports and the music industry, or the misperceptions of Black males as lazy, trifling, promiscuous, predatory, angry, threatening… I certainly think that our role is to speak to sociopolitical and economic truths that may overlap other groups but lack our distinctive voice.*

*I wish Black male educators were more numerous; that we were well-represented in P-12 across all grades and disciplines. I wish that we had more diverse roles across settings and were reflected within and across administrations, as well. If this were the case, then I wouldn't feel so much pressure as a Black male to be 'representative.' One can never be sure of the perception of others. However, I believe that my colleagues respect me for my work ethic, my intelligence, and my commitment to personal growth and professional development. For these same reasons, I feel that administrators may see me as arrogant or intimidating. Overall, I have a good rapport with my students, which only comes after several weeks of consistency, fairness, classroom management, content and pedagogical knowledge, and transparency.*

*One challenge I have experienced as a Black male educator is the challenge of "fitting into" spaces culturally, socially, professionally, and physically. Despite the overwhelming diversity found in our country, Black males teachers often work in school buildings and systems in which we may be the only one, or one of a paltry few. We make up a very small percentage of the teaching population and an even smaller number of administrators. And, we may be overrepresented proportionally in "marginalized" areas, such as Special Education teachers, Paraprofessionals, Deans, and Coaches, rather than content, honors, and Advanced Placement teachers.*

*For me, "fitting in" has become about navigating the dominant, predominantly White and female school culture and making myself palatable and non-threatening to my administration. Protocols of "politeness" and "professionalism" limit my ability to demonstrate a passion for my subject and students lest I embody the "angry" or "threatening" Black male stereotype. My expectations for student excellence devolve into conversations about "appropriate tone" and "climate."*

*One of the ways that I have overcome these obstacles is by being grounded in pedagogy and allowing the research to speak for my teaching outlook and practices. I make sure that my instructional methods are rooted in sound, current pedagogy that I can reference and articulate ad nauseam. Justifying my educational choices in cultural relevance, backward planning, universal design, social studies practices, etc., has proven a bulwark against administrative opinion and whim. Also, I work to build among my students the expectation of excellence in my classroom, and achieving demonstrable outcomes in terms of student academic gains has helped — it's difficult to criticize positive results. Finally, I've sought professional development outside of my building.*

*I have NO interest in being a principal! I love the 'teach' of teaching: the figuring out how to support my students in their academic journey, the science of curricular planning, seeing light bulbs go on when students are engaged. However, I believe a major benefit to having more Black male educators in administrative roles is the increase of diversity at the upper levels of the education system. Black male administrators could bring their identities, experiences, and ways of being to shift the administrative and academic cultures of school systems and buildings. Increasing the number of Black teachers at all levels across elementary and secondary education would allow more Black male educators to feel that it is okay that they "leave the classroom" without fear of leaving their students without Black male teachers in the classroom.*

# PROMISING RECOMMENDATIONS

*"We may not be able to change the perception others may have of us,*

*but we can definitely give them more things to think about…"*

Increasing the Black male teacher representation in schools across the nation requires strategic, deliberate planning, including targeted, collaborative efforts at the national, state, local, and district, and school levels. A long-term commitment of resources and continuous championing for the adequate diversification of our nation's classrooms remains as the most promising way to effectively staff Black male educators within schools and create seamless voyage through this career trajectory into and within the teaching profession.

While we have previously noted some promising grassroots programs, we further provide the following recommendations–focused on the key areas of recruitment, retention, and mobility–for consideration:

***Recruitment:***

⇒ Increase targeted recruitment initiatives and incentives, especially at the state and federal levels, to attract Black males to and successfully support necessary training for teacher preparation. To help attract qualified candidates, possible financial incentives include loan-forgiveness programs, covering certification costs, and tuition reimbursement packages for future professional development and certifications.

⇒ Partner with local HBCUs in order to attract more Black males to the teaching profession. School districts should consider building partnerships with these universities for opportunities to provide early exposure to teaching as an option and to create the necessary pipeline for increasing the numbers of both teacher candidates and qualified teachers.

⇒ Ensure diverse representations on all hiring committees and provide cultural competency guidance as an element of committee preparation. In instances where good-faith efforts cannot ensure a diverse committee within the school, expand the committee reach within districts.

⇒ Enact legislation that embeds educator diversity at all levels as a core tenant of civil rights. Changes in federal and state administrations should not determine if the recruitment of Black male teachers remains a priority. Given the persistent and extensive underrepresentation of this population in school settings, continued advocacy for the diversification of the teaching profession should remain a priority of policy makers and advocates at all levels of government.

⇒ Target males who are retired, seeking a second-career, or recently discharged from military service for recruitment to increase the numbers within the teacher pipeline. Performance-based grants at the federal and state levels can assist in expanding effective "Grow Your Own" initiatives.

***Retention:***

⇒ Prioritize district funding to ensure a targeted onboarding experience for Black male teachers and other teachers of color. Research shows that a comprehensive teacher onboarding process for new teachers improves retention. This includes prior cultural competency development of assigned mentors/Master Teachers, creating opportunities for collaboration with other teachers, and fair and consistent feedback and policy implementation.

⇒ Provide meaningful district and school level professional development and targeted support for alternatively certified teachers. Data shows that many Black male teachers achieve certification through alternative methods. Ensuring that teachers have the necessary knowledge, skill and comfort in the classroom will contribute to retention.

⇒ Adopt state- and district-wide cultural competency initiatives. Continuous improvement initiatives aimed at inclusivity could create specific and deliberate efforts to socialize Black men into the school culture and ensure they are treated equally. School districts would benefit from providing ongoing professional development on implicit bias to administrators and staff particularly those responsible for the hiring and advancement of Black male teachers.

***Mobility:***

⇒ Prioritize the hiring of additional Black male educators as assistant principals, principals, superintendents, and district officers. A critical examination of the pipeline for advancement reveals the need to cultivate of meaningful opportunities for Black men to engage at all levels within the school district. Few efforts of scale have been mounted to build on existing minority teacher pipeline programs and advocate for greater diversity at the building and district levels. Visibility across administration provides opportunities to highlight the benefits of Black male representation as well as the ongoing need for diversification at this level.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Germinal theories surrounding the overarching goals of P-12 education include developing children to serve as contributing members of a democratic society. With this in mind, each of us must honestly consider the underlying message conveyed when Black male educators are notably absent from the essential process of educating youth. Moreover, what are our individual and collective social responsibilities to create the positive changes necessary for creating inclusivity for all within our nation's schools?

In recognition of persistent obstacles to recruiting, retaining, and advancing Black male educators, there is a critical obligation for policymakers and school administrators to continue to consciously examine and implement sustainable initiatives aimed at creating inclusive classrooms and providing equitable and supportive school environments where all can thrive. These actions will create embracing, diversified learning environments, which ultimately benefit all stakeholders within schools. Further, when reflecting on social justice-related systems of societal inequalities and inequities, this knowledge creates opportunities to strategically challenge many of the persistent stereotypes of Black men–and all people of color–within society.

While we have presented several successful existing initiatives targeting the recruitment of Black male educators, especially at the grassroots level, current scholarship combined with the lived experiences of the NNSTOY Fellows affirm the need to

continually propel these issues to the forefront of conversations and to champion the creation of deliberate and sustainable actions to diversify the teaching profession. The recruitment of Black males educators remains a necessary imperative, and the voices of these exceptional NNSTOY Fellows serve as the "coal miner's canary," highlighting the desideratum to critically examine and support the Black male educator's career trajectory at every phase.

Moving forward, it is important to accurately and fully comprehend the purpose of this paper which is not to bemoan the plight of Black male educators by any means. Instead, we present this narrative as an impetus to highlight the continued need for further exploration and consequential action to increase the numbers of Black males in the teaching profession. Moreover, for those Black males currently represented in the teaching ranks, we propose that these reflections lead to the generation of additional initiatives to support positive experiences within classrooms and create additional opportunities for Black male representation in school leadership positions. Effectively dismantling the entrenched hurdles many encounter within their teaching careers requires a dedicated commitment by advocates, policymakers, and school administrators at all levels to critically examine and address these obstacles.

*"I've never wanted to be anything other than what I am and I have never mourned my position as a Black male. Yes, I do have to navigate some things. Yes, I have to think about things that other races don't have to consider. But, the things I have encountered have made me a better educator."*

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