

Black Men of the Classroom:

A Policy Brief for How Boston Public Schools Can Recruit and Retain Black Male Teachers¹

Black Male Teachers are Scarce and Important

The challenges faced by Black male teachers in schools may serve as the canary in the coalmine that begins to explain the debilitating condition faced by Black boys in schools. Black males represent 1.9% of all public school teachers,ⁱ yet have one of the highest rates of turnover.ⁱⁱ Attempts to increase the number of Black male teachersⁱⁱⁱ are based on research that suggests these new recruits can improve Black boys' schooling outcomes.^{iv} Below, I share findings from a study based on the school-based experiences of 27 Black male teachers in Boston Public Schools (BPS), approximately 10 percent of Black male teachers in the district. This study – one of the largest studies conducted exclusively on Black male teachers – has implications for policymakers and school administrators looking to recruit and retain Black male teachers.

Findings

Early Experience Teaching Influenced Decision to Become a Teacher

- Black male teachers described multiple pathways into the teaching profession. About 63 percent of participants had an early experience teaching in high school, college, an after-school program, or as a substitute teacher, which influenced their decision to enter the teaching profession.

Challenges of Being the Only Black Male Teacher

- Black male teachers' experience and satisfaction depended on whether they were the only Black man in the school, a “Loner,”^v or one of many Black men in their schools, a “Grouper.” Loners believed they were socially alone and disconnected from the core mission of the school. One participant noted: “It almost feels like I’m in someone else’s house, intruding.” Schools with many Black male teachers were *more likely* to have a Black principal (see Appendix).

Behavior Managers More Than Teachers

- Participants believed that their colleagues, particularly White females, sought their help in dealing with misbehavior rather than their advice about teaching. Black male teachers expressed frustration that their primary interaction with colleagues was to receive assistance redirecting students' misbehavior, as opposed to support with teaching content. As one participant noted, “I can see most people would feel enthused that they’re helping out their colleagues like they picked me because they respect me [but] it’s also becoming a burden now because I have other things to do. I have to plan. I have to plan for my kids to be on a specific track, plan my scope and sequence, and correct papers. Just the regular things that teachers do.”

Black Male Teachers More Likely to Leave Lower Performing Schools

- During interviews, teachers were asked about their decisions to stay or leave. Then, at the start of the next academic year, teachers were briefly interviewed to determine if they stayed or moved schools. Loners, schools with one Black male teacher, stayed. Loners highlighted positive working conditions, specifically the positive school environment and students, as the two primary factors that influenced their decisions to remain at their schools. One Loner, who described experiencing racial harassment by

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both his administrator and colleagues, noted “I enjoy my job; it’s a good job,” but conceded: “I suspect I’m going to have some sort of challenges no matter where I go because I’m a Black male.”

- Groupers, schools with many Black male teachers, moved. Groupers cited poor working conditions as their reasons for leaving. They also suggested that many of their colleagues across all racial groups intended to leave because of poor working conditions. One participant who resigned at the end of the academic year recounted how, after he collected all cellular phones from students before the MCAS, another administrator stopped and frisked students while they were taking the exam. The participant decried, “That is a microcosm of what it’s like to go to school here...this isn’t a prison. We can’t treat our kids like they are criminals... I’m just done.”
- Finally, there were two teachers, both Groupers, who were exited from their schools. In particular, one participant at an exam school explained that he was dismissed because of his colleague’s inferiority complexes. With undergraduate and graduate degrees from two of the country’s most prestigious institutions and a teacher of a core subject in STEM, the participant described how a fellow colleague suggested he was “too polished, too well rounded, and couldn’t understand why I was teaching.”

Recommendations

Target Black Male High School Students to Enter the Teaching Profession

- Policy makers and district officials looking to increase the pipeline of Black male teachers should consider opportunities for Black boys and young men, in BPS, to experience teaching. Such opportunities might include targeting and training a select group of Black male high school juniors and seniors to enter the teaching pipeline.
- **Attending to Retention Can Increase the Number of Black Male Teachers in BPS**
District officials should give attention to retention if they desire to increase the number of Black male teachers. Half of the Groupers, who were teaching in some of the district’s most underperforming schools, left. Resources and leadership of the high-poverty, high-minority schools must be improved.

Design Professional Development Targeted for Black Male Teachers

- To increase Black male teacher retention, district officials should concentrate on improving these teachers’ experiences and the schools in which they teach. The district’s current initiative, the Male Educators of Color Executive Coaching Seminar Series, which was modeled after the Boston Teacher Residency Male Educator of Color Networking Group, could be bolstered with specific attention to providing socio-emotional support to male teachers of color and a space to reflect on their practice.

Racial and Gender Awareness Training for New and Current Administrators

- District officials should include racial and gender awareness training for new administrators and on-going training for current administrators. These sessions could be designed and run by male teachers of color in the Male Educators of Color Executive Coaching Seminar Series.

Encourage Schools to Have More Than One Black Male Teacher on the Faculty

- To deal with Loners’ isolation, the district should identify schools with one Black male teacher and strongly encourage administrators to hire additional Black men.

Enlarging Scope of the Office of Equity

- Enlarge the scope of the Office of Equity to review all cases where Black male teachers are excused or dismissed.

ⁱ Duncan, A. (2011). Leading a life of consequence. Speech presented at Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC.

ⁱⁱ Ingersoll, R. & May, H. (2011). Recruitment, retention, and the minority teacher shortage. Philadelphia, PA: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania and Center for Educational Research in the Interest of Underserved Students, University of California, Santa Cruz.

ⁱⁱⁱ Duncan, A. (2011). Leading a life of consequence. Speech presented at Fayetteville State University, Fayetteville, NC.

^{iv} Dee, T. S. (2004). Teachers, race and student achievement in a randomized experiment. *The Review of Economics and Statistics*, 86 (1).

^v Bristol, T. J. (2014). Not strangers: How social distance influences black male teachers' perceptions of their male students of color. In Y. Sealy-Ruiz, C. Lewis, & I. Toldson (Eds.), *Teacher education and the black community*. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.

Appendix: Study Design

Findings from this dissertation were based on two interviews and observations of 27 Black male teachers across fourteen schools in Boston Public Schools. Seven participants were the only Black male teachers, or *Loners*, on their faculty. 20 participants were in schools with three or more Black male teachers, or *Grouper*s, on the faculty. My two primary sources of data - interviews and observational field notes - allowed me to answer my research questions. I used an audio recorder for each interview. I then sent the recording to a transcription company that transcribed each interview. Interviews provide one source of information to answer research questions. Over the course of my interviews, I inquired about how the organizational factors influenced the ways in which Black male teachers experienced schools.

Specifically, I conducted two waves of interviews with study participants. Since Loner schools by definition had just one Black male teacher, I interviewed that individual in each Loner school. For my Grouper schools, I used a purposive sample to select teachers. Specifically, I selected teachers in varying core content areas (e.g. English and Language Arts, math, science, and/or social studies), as well as physical education. I selected Black male teachers in Grouper schools to interview until I reached data saturation of the organizational characteristics influencing respondents' experiences. Specifically, I interviewed two – four teachers in each Grouper school.

After analyzing data from the first wave, I conducted a second wave of interviews informed by preliminary findings. During the second wave of interviews, I asked participants to engage in meaning making around their experiences as Black men within the organization. As part of this project's focus is on understanding how the within school experiences affect Black male teachers' decision to stay or leave their current schools, I was able to capture those teachers who were considering changing schools, specifically, or leaving the profession, more generally. In the end I conducted two waves of interviews with twenty-four participants. Two participants left their schools during the data collection period. And, due to constant scheduling conflicts, I was unable to interview another participant.

In addition to interviews, I also collected data through observations. My observation records were primarily hand-written notes. Typically, I arrived about ten minutes before the mutually agreed upon time to get some insight into participant's day-to-day interactions and experiences. In the end, data collected through participant observation consisted primarily of field notes.

Table 1: 2012- 2013 BPS Schools that have 0, 1, 2 or 3 or more Black Teachers Disaggregated by the Percentage of the Principal's Race

Number of Black Male Teachers	Number of Schools	Principal's Race			
		Black	White	Latino	Asian
0	32	31%	56%	9%	3%
1	28	43%	43%	10%	7%
2	15	40%	53%	7%	0%

3 or more	43	55%	32%	13%	0%
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