



I Hope My Black Students Will Become Educators Too

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This is the note. This is the note.

Mr. Walters, my middle school choir teacher, took his love of music and teaching music seriously. He would say those words as he hit the piano key hard in hopes that we would

eventually sing on key. He wanted us to perform with excellence, and he was the first Black teacher I had.

IF STUDENTS DON'T HAVE OR DON'T SEE BLACK TEACHERS IN THEIR SCHOOL, WHAT MESSAGE DOES THIS SEND NOT ONLY TO THE BLACK STUDENTS, BUT TO ALL STUDENTS?

Although there were a few Black teachers in my elementary school, I was not assigned to any of their classes. Typically, when I saw a Black person in the school building, they were serving food in the cafeteria or keeping the building clean. There is nothing wrong with those roles, and they are critical to the success of school buildings. However, if students don't have or don't see Black teachers in their school, what message does this send not only to the Black students, but to all students?

We need Black teachers. We don't need them only because they are Black to check an arbitrary diversity box. We need them because Black students deserve to have a teacher who looks like them. Research has shown that having a quality Black teacher positively impacts Black students, and Black teachers impact all students.

I became what I didn't see enough of. Although I have worked at the elementary, middle school, and high school level, I spent the majority of my career in secondary. Like me, many of my students did not have their first Black teacher until middle school. I was that first Black teacher for many of my students. Sometimes I would get comments like, "Mrs. Barnes, you are really, really smart." I would respond with thanks, but I also wondered why students said that. Did they have so few experiences with Black teachers, or even Black adults, that they couldn't imagine me being competent in my content?

TO GET MORE BLACK TEACHERS IN THE PIPELINE, BLACK STUDENTS NEED TO HAVE POSITIVE SCHOOL EXPERIENCES TO WANT TO RETURN BACK TO THE SCHOOL BUILDING AS AN EDUCATOR.

I hope because of having me as a teacher that some of my former students, who are Black, consider education as a career path. To get more Black teachers in the pipeline, Black students need to have positive school experiences to want to return back to the school building as an educator. I know some Black teachers become teachers because of bad school experiences, but I want more to Black teachers to have good school experiences.

Black teachers are out there, but schools have to be willing to hire them. School leaders also have to accept that bringing in diversity means their school will change. It will change for the better.

That's why I devote time to mentoring Black teachers and even worked with a group of Black high school students who were considering teaching as a career path. Getting more Black teachers in schools is going to take hard work from all of us.