Study 4: EOC Pathways Report

Study Author:

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Study Purpose:

To determine from current educators of color at Cambridge Rindge & Latin School, what their own educational experiences were, the motivations behind their becoming educators, and their recommendations for creating a pathway for young people of color to enter the education profession.

Methodology:

This qualitative study was originally intended to be conducted as focus groups of 3-4 participants each, however only one focus group of 3 participants took place due to scheduling challenges and conflicts. All other interviews, five additional, took place either via email correspondence or in one-on-one interviews.

Participants were asked about the same general topics (personal K-12 experience, higher educational experience, motivations for entering education, experiences in education, recommendations for a pathway program), but the questions asked differed depending on the course the conversations took and/or the interviewees' interests or experiences.

The participants and data from the study have been anonymized via a random numbering system and are referred to throughout the study by their given number. Identifying information has also been kept out of the study.

Findings:

The findings are separated by the major topics which guided the questions and interviews.

K-12 Experiences:

Schools & Curriculum Were White-Washed

All the educators interviewed reported having had no educators of color or very few in their K-12 educational experience. Two of the eight participants reported having had no educator of color at all; one participant reported having a single

educator of color that was subsequently fired after one year. Further, they also reported feeling disempowered by the curriculum, which was similarly devoid of diverse content or consideration. As one participant put it, "My K-12 career prepared me for going to a segregated school" (#4), in reference to their subsequent college experience. Participant #3 reported only studying Africa in the context of the natural resources the continent held and which stood to be exploited by white Europeans. They further described feeling a deep sense of betrayal when she arrived at college and finally began to learn about "[them]self".

Impact of Educators of Color - More than Teachers, Redefinition of Self

For those participants that reported having some educators of color in their K-12 experience, they reported those educators as being "more than teachers" and challenging all students to redefine what each person was capable of. Key among all participants was the way in which educators of color were dedicated to building positive relationships with their students. Participant #7 described the one educator of color in their high school as more than a classroom teacher; they were like "a mother to all kids". Participant #4 described their first experience with an educator of color in 2nd grade as transformative because prior to that they had only known school to be "a place to get in trouble." But, because their 2nd grade teacher believed in them, they were able to redefine what school was about and what they were capable of. To this day, they report still having the report card and comments their teacher gave them. Finally, Participant #2 reported that "Mr. _____ showed up to my basketball games on weekends, had me reading books that at the time I could never even imagine as well as praise me for the high quality work I began to produce."

Post-Secondary Experiences:

Impact of Educators of Color II - More than Teachers, Redefinition of Self

Many participants reported similar or same experiences with educators of color in the post-secondary education. For those who had an educator of color for the first time, it not only helped them feel at ease, but they were also the professors who taught and showed interest in the history, stories, culture of their students of color even if the professor did not share that same background. Further, the professors of color modeled what pride in oneself and amongst people of color should and could look like.

For at least half of the participants, they reported the importance of having educators of color in college when they were also undergoing their own exploration and education of self, both as individuals, but also members of a broader community. Participant #3 reported that one professor of color "fed my

soul" in a way that had not happened in high school. Participant #1 reported, "Similar experiences were had with the Black educators in my post-secondary studies (as with my K-12 years), as they encouraged me to delve into my racial identity, challenge whitewashing norms, and to use critical thinking to support any progressive impact." For Participant #7, they described their professor of color becoming upset when they could not "see in [them]self what others saw, what he saw."

Lack of Educators of Color

One participant reported that the lack of educators of color at their post-secondary institution, combined with structural inequities, made for a difficult college experience. For Participant #6, their university had a predominately white student and staff body while being located in a majority black surrounding neighborhood. Many of the students and staff they encountered spoke of their fear of the surrounding neighborhood and neighbors and not wanting to leave the campus grounds. Further, the few professors of color in the science and math fields were of South Asian background, which white students pointed to as reason for their low performance in those professors' classes. Some of their peers went so far as to say they could not learn from those professors because of their accents.

Motivations for Entering the Field of Education:

Support & Guidance for Young People

At least three of eight participants communicated that one motivation for becoming an educator was the desire to help children of color feel represented, as well as providing guidance. In one case, Participant #5 chose to initially begin their career as a science teacher because of their own experience with no educators of color in the science fields. Participant #1 acknowledged "the level of impact & responsibility in integrating youth voices, empowering individuals to become active thinkers and players within their community" created a sense of duty, but also joy.

Early, Formative Experiences

By far the largest motivating factor for current educators of color to initially enter the profession was early experiences of their own in the role of an educator; this was true for at least five out of eight participants. Two common experiences amongst several participants was serving as a tutor for siblings, parents, and family friends while they were still students themselves. Participant #8 spoke of the importance of the opportunity to tutor and teach back at their alma mater high school during summers while in college; it not only made them want to enter

education, but also fostered a relationship with their former high school and eventually led to their first full-time education job. Participant #6 also cited their work in tutoring community members at their church and teaching incarcerated persons during their college years.

Educator Experiences:

Institutional Culture

Some participants spoke specifically to the topic of institutional culture as both reasons for wanting and not wanting to continue at an institution or even in the field of education. Earlier in their career, Participant #7 spoke of how their first educational placement in a university setting was empowering. They had a supervisor and mentor that continually challenged them and gave them added responsibilities, showing a true commitment to the values of equity and diversity. But, their second placement afterwards lacked all of those aspects. So, they reported that when the institution claimed to value equity and diversity, it rang hollow and they left the institution. Others reported that a lack of appreciation made their hard work feel like it was not valued. This extended to Participant #2's experience in the Cambridge Public Schools (CPS), where they feel "we don't respect our best and hardest workers and we tend to lose them to other districts that make it extremely clear how high they are valued."

Teacher Mentorship

In connection to institutional culture, several participants mentioned the importance of mentorship for students (more on that below), but Participant #5 spoke about their own experiences with mentorship as an educator in the CPS district. Specifically, they mentioned how critical it was to have two informal mentors when they first started in Cambridge because they "pushed" them and made them feel "loved".

Family Network Resistance to Education Profession

Some participants who identify as immigrants or from immigrant families communicated a lot of resistance from their families around the decision to become an educator. Both participants communicated that their families wanted them to be lawyers, doctors, or engineers, but not educators.

Recommendations for the Creation of a Pathway Program for Students of Color to become Educators:

Student Mentorship

At least three out of eight participants identified the need for students to have mentors and be mentors for one another, as well as involving community members to serve as mentors. Not only did some identify this as mostly lacking (Participant #5), but also as a way to increase support and community at CRLS and between different age groups & school levels (i.e. high school mentors for middle school students) (Participants #3 & 5)

Educational Experiences & Practice

Many participants spoke of the need for any Pathway program to incorporate the praxis of education with the teaching of the history and methodology. Further, Participant #5 saw it as necessary and potentially transformative for that praxis to be joined with positive feedback and success, especially for students who may not have experienced such success previously.

Pathway Program Goals Must Be Equity, Representation, & Meaningful Employment

At least three out of eight participants spoke of the need for any Pathway program to serve those communities most underrepresented in the education field, but also to translate into a meaningful investment in the young people who participate. Participant #5 was especially worried about this program being co-opted or for the benefit of those students and families that already know how to access all the resources, events, groups, etc. in CPS. Instead they would like to see the Pathway program directed at those students who seem "lost" in the system. Participants #2 & 8 felt that for the program to be successful both CPS and university partners in the area need to commit to it. That said, if they do, it stands to greatly benefit both the CPS community which needs a more diverse educator staff and the area universities which need students in their programs. Participant #2 specifically stated, "The only thing I wish from this district is that they would stop wasting so much money on technology that will become outdated and invest into the people that can come in and change the culture and way of being."

Improve Institutional Culture in CPS

Finally, there was one participant (#1) who reported feeling that a Pathway program for young people of color to become educators of color in Cambridge was not a good idea because of their own experiences within the district. Specifically, they stated "we have to eradicate the toxic environment that exhausts Black teachers/teachers of color, thus discouraging them on continuing and/or advocating for others to enter this district. To comfortably encourage students of

color now to become teachers here would be a disservice to them (considering this current climate).”