



Men of Color in Educational Leadership

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Good afternoon to all the providers of “hope” and thank you for being here to discuss such an incredibly important topic, our Black students and Educators. Before I get started, I’d like to take a few moments to extend our thoughts and prayers our brothers and sisters in arms, and their families, who our Commander in Chief has ordered to support our allies in the Middle East and around the world. As a United States Navy veteran, I know the sacrifices they make, and I fervently wish for their safe return home to their loved ones.

Let us not forget that our democracy and the security of our allies rest on the shoulders of the men and women who are defending our nation around the globe. Their bravery is a testament to the values we hold dear, and we owe them our deepest gratitude. As we gather here today, let us keep these individuals in our hearts and minds, for they are the true guardians of freedom and justice.

In addition, I want to recognize the backbone of our educational system – our remarkable teachers. They are the unsung heroes on the front lines every day, serving our children, particularly those who are most vulnerable. Their dedication and passion are instrumental in shaping the future of our nation.

Chairman Harris, Chairman Schweyer members of the Pennsylvania House Appropriations Committee, esteemed colleagues, and fellow citizens, I would like to express my heartfelt appreciation to Chairman Jordan Harris for inviting me to testify today, especially during National Principals Month, when we celebrate and acknowledge the incredible dedication and hard work of our school leaders. Over the next few minutes, I will underscore the critical need for educator diversity, more specifically men of color in education and, advocate for some key educator diversity policies and strategies.

I am a career educator with over 2 decades learning and leading. I completed the first decade of my career in Orange County Florida serving as a 4th and 5th grade teacher, high school AP, and a middle school principal, I went on to serve as high school principal in Charlotte Mecklenburg, I spent nearly 5 years on the Southside of Chicago as the chief of schools supporting and managing a large portfolio of schools, then to Houston ISD as the chief high school officer, returned to Florida as the Deputy Superintendent, Chief of Schools of Hillsborough County Schools where we supported North of 250 schools that serve over 230,000 students. From there I was tapped by then, the Governor of Rhode Island, now Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo to serve as state turnaround Supt for the Providence Public Schools Department. As you can see, I have spent my entire career serving in large complex and diverse organizations solving some of the most challenging urban educational dilemmas. Currently, I serve as co-founder and CEO of MCEL (Men of Color in Educational Leadership). The reason I share this with you is because I offer a unique perspective and framing of our time



## Men of Color in Educational Leadership

together. In all my experiences, there has been this pervasive absence of men of color in education.

This is one of several alarming areas of educator diversity; And where I spend my time as CEO of MCEL. As a national non-profit profit, we are working diligently to support **staving off the extinction** of men of color in education. I understand that extinction is a strong word but I assure you it is very real. Our public education ecosystem serves the majority students of color, yet teachers and principal make up only 20% and 23% of the workforce.

Now, we all step into this space with various mental models, identities, and lived experiences. However, can we agree around this one idea? And that idea is, if we don't tell adults the truth we are lying to kids?

- The truth is black students do not receive quality instruction everyday
- The truth is, men of color represent only 3% of the education workforce
- The truth is, men of color are leaving at higher rates than our counter parts
- The truth is, fewer men of color are choosing education as a viable career option.
- In a recent Vanderbilt study, black male teachers are rated lower on their performance appraisals than their white counterparts, even when they are equally credentialed and even when their students score at or above the same level of the students of their counterparts.

The truth is, without immediate intervention men of color in education could reach an extinction level event within the next decade. What we do know is, when we have leaders color in our schools:

- Communities feel more connected
- Marginalized students feel safer
- Students are less likely to be identified as needing special education services
- Students of color are more likely to pursue post-secondary options
- Reading and math schools are higher
- The truth is, a diverse educator workforce is good for all children

### **Ok, now the big question: So what, now what?**

There has to be a deep investment in educator diversity with a keen focus on men of color. The investment must center on both funding and policy. At a very high level this is where we should be investing:

1. Teacher and leader prep programs with an increased focus on minority serving institutions. Explore non-traditional models like, paid apprenticeships, grow your own programs, and



## Men of Color in Educational Leadership

alternative certification programs. As a matter of fact, a few years ago, there were some promising practices stemming from right here in Pennsylvania with the “aspire to educate”

program; Bring that back. Equally critical is the investment in leadership. Research suggests that school leaders have nearly as much impact, and in some instance more, on student learning as the classroom teacher. Also, teachers will tell you, I will wake up early every day and drive all the way across town to work for a leader who gives me support, voice, and agency. However, I would not walk out my front door right across the street to a school where the leader ineffective. Leadership matters.

2. Support financially and increased compensation has proven to be an effective strategy, when coupled with other powerful practices. Loan forgiveness, financial incentives for recruitment and retention. Housing programs where down-payment assistance is offered. Perhaps we look to the Kansas City regions where the organization “Teachers Like Me” is building apartments to house new teachers at a subsidized rate.

3. Human Resource strategies around the hiring process. Timing matters as districts are constantly hiring and recruiting. The annual mass hiring fairs must begin early. Supporting school level hiring teams and ensuring there is diversity on these team. Do we have processes and systems in place to track applicants from their initial interest through the hiring/selection process? Do our hiring committees reflect the diversity we are trying to achieve. Are we looking to overhaul last in first out polices have shown a negative impact on the diversity in our educator workforce?

My last one is not explicitly stated this way in the research but I will exercise a small bit of personal privilege to paraphrase: If we want greater educator and leader diversity: we have to fundamentally change the prek-12 experiences of our black and brown students. How can we expect children of color to enter the education profession when they represent the community that is disproportionately suspended, arrested, labeled special education, limited to no access to gifted and talented programs or advanced placement courses? We must change their experience.

I will conclude with a quick story. True story: Governor Raimondo..., what are you willing to risk? We adults must enter into a social contract with our children where we are willing to risk it all for their success. That is my question to you, what are you willing to risk to ensure that all children have an opportunity to experience success.

Thank you for this opportunity,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Harrison Peters', is written over a white background.

Harrison Peters, CEO, [MCEL](http://mcel.org)