



# THE CALL FOR AFRICAN AMERICAN EDUCATORS

## The Need for African American Educators in the Workforce

“When I ask teachers why they teach, they almost always say that it is because they want to make a difference in the lives of children.”

~ Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan

As a nation we have long held fast to the belief that education unlocks the pathway to opportunity. However, America’s classrooms lack teachers with diverse backgrounds prepared to teach our diverse students. When 40 percent of public school students are African American or Hispanic, but less than 15 percent of our nation’s teachers are Black or Latino, too many students miss opportunities to witness individuals who look like them, understand or share their experiences, and conspire for their success. Children from diverse backgrounds benefit from educators who both affirm them during their identity development and who understand and share linguistic and cultural practices. Cultural familiarity helps educators to support student learning and growth, and to disrupt bias, discrimination, and prejudice. It is equally important for white students, and students of all races, to develop a deep understanding of the world around them by learning with and from diverse educators.

**According to the U.S. Department of Education:** African American students are 2.9 times as likely to be labeled mentally retarded, 1.9 times as likely to be labeled emotionally disturbed, and 1.3 times as likely to be labeled as having a learning disability as their white peers.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, only 2 percent of K-12 public school teachers are African American males.<sup>2</sup> African Americans as a whole accounted for

<sup>1</sup> <http://bit.ly/1IHRFnt>

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/10/how\\_race\\_matters\\_in\\_the\\_classroom.2.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/10/how_race_matters_in_the_classroom.2.html)

<sup>3</sup> <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013313.pdf>

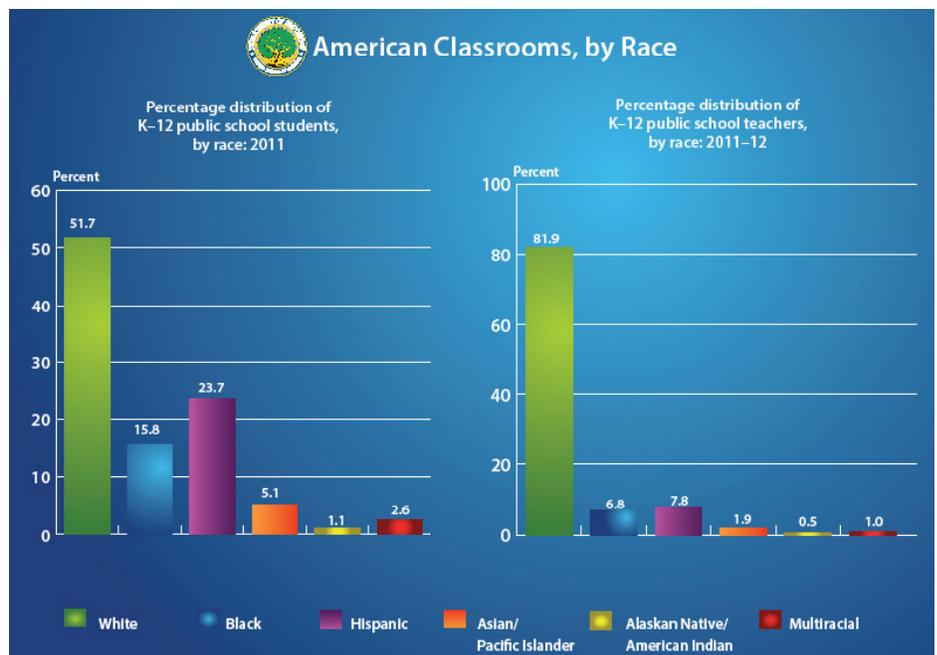
<sup>4</sup> Read the full report, [http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/02/26/22nicolas\\_ep.h33.html](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2014/02/26/22nicolas_ep.h33.html)

10.1 percent of school principals in 2012.<sup>3</sup> The same year, there were 7,902,490 African American students, compared to only 230,194 African American teachers.

### The Need for African American Educators

We must increase the number of minority and male educators serving as models, mentors, and sources of support for our students. Black educators are on the cusp of an opportunity not only to teach, but also to create learning environments that are critical, challenging, safe, supportive, civically engaging, and culturally competent. Here is why Black educators must take these opportunities:

1. Educators must be culturally sensitive to their students. For example, African American male teachers can help address the fact that in the majority of a child’s education, he or she may never see a Black male teacher.<sup>4</sup>
2. According to Ivory A. Toldson, Ph.D., “Black students [are] less likely to perceive empathy and respect from their teachers and more likely to view the school as a punitive learning environment than



Source: National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, U.S. Department of Education, *Digest of Education Statistics 2013* (2015), tables 203.60 and 209.10. Available at <http://nces.ed.gov/pubs2015/2015011.pdf>

white students.” Toldson asserts that these results suggest that “teachers may be operating under an implicit association bias, whereby ... they may view black children as security risks.”<sup>5</sup> A diverse and culturally competent work force can improve this challenging classroom construction.

## The Historical Significance of African American Educators

Sixty years ago, in *Brown vs. The Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas*, the Supreme Court declared that “separate, but equal” facilities were unconstitutional in the American educational system. The legacy of *Brown* is that effective teachers and school leaders who interact with students of color, particularly in African American community schools, are more than simply purveyors of teaching and learning. They are expected to engage and support all students. According to Linda C. Tillman in the *African American Principals and the Legacy of Brown* report, *Brown* was significant to African American educators for two reasons:

1. The work of Black principals in the post-*Brown* era has contributed to the theory and practice of educational leadership.
2. One of the goals of the decision was to remedy educational inequities and allow Black principals to continue their work under improved social and educational conditions.<sup>6</sup>

Leaders in the field of education who understand the history behind educational access and equity give students from historically undersupported communities the opportunity to be educated in culturally and socially competent spaces.

## How You Can Help

You can teach. Teaching is an important opportunity to serve the community and our country. It is a way to help students acquire the skills and experiences they need to be successful in school and in life. To support educators, the federal government provides the following resources:

### TEACH Grant

Grants of up to \$4,000 a year to students who plan to complete course work needed to begin a career in teaching. Learn more at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/types/grants-scholarships/teach#what-is-a-teach-grant>

<sup>5</sup>Read information on the *National Crime Victimization Survey: School Crime Supplement*, [http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/10/how\\_race\\_matters\\_in\\_the\\_classroom.2.html](http://www.theroot.com/articles/culture/2012/10/how_race_matters_in_the_classroom.2.html)

<sup>6</sup>Read the full report, [http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/23168\\_Chapter\\_11.pdf](http://www.sagepub.com/upm-data/23168_Chapter_11.pdf)

## Teach.org Scholarships

Scholarship and grants for teachers to fund their education and teaching preparation needs within the field of education. There are also scholarships available for people who choose to pursue careers in school administration. Learn more at <https://www.teach.org/teaching-scholarships>

## Teach.org Financial Aid

Financial aid and other scholarships for rising and current teachers. Learn more at <https://www.teach.org/teaching-federal-aid-programs>

## Federal Teacher Loan Forgiveness Program

Under this program those who teach full-time for five complete and consecutive academic years may, in certain circumstances, be eligible for forgiveness of up to a combined total of \$17,500 on their federal Direct Subsidized and Unsubsidized loans, and their Subsidized and Unsubsidized Federal Stafford loans. Learn more at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/teacher>

## Public Service Loan Forgiveness Program

This program forgives the balance on Direct Loans after the borrower has made 120 qualifying payments under a repayment plan while working full-time for a qualifying employer. Learn more at <https://studentaid.ed.gov/sa/repay-loans/forgiveness-cancellation/public-service>.

## Learn More

Learn more about the White House Initiative on Educational Excellence for African Americans at <http://www.ed.gov/AfAmEducation>



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