

Recruitment and Retention of African American and Latino School Administrators

Andrea M. Haynes

University of Nebraska at Omaha

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Abstract

As school districts continue to grapple with issues of raising student achievement juxtaposed with increasing populations of children who come from diverse and impoverished backgrounds - the recruitment, retention, and development of school administrators who can meet the needs of all students and school communities are in high demand. School districts in the new millennium are tasked with a myriad of both opportunities and challenges. The new complexities that are presented when there is more diversity in race, culture, linguistics, interests, abilities, life experiences, and worldviews can be met head-on by recruiting and retaining diverse school leaders. School districts must work towards establishing a philosophical approach to this subject that supports the importance of a diverse leadership team not only in words but also in actions. The research brief discusses the implications of why racial diversity is important in school leadership and describes robust strategies that can positively affect the processes and outcomes and thereby providing a principal pipeline that is both diverse and effective.

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Research Question

This paper examines the need for the examination and implementation of effective strategies associated with the successful recruitment and retention of African American and Latino school administrators. The following two-part question provides the foundation for this research brief: *Why is the successful recruitment and retention of African American and Latino school administrators important, and what are some of the proven high-yield strategies and activities?*

Introduction

The recruitment, retention, and development of school administrators is of monumental significance for all school districts across the country. Recent research continues to point to the fact that effectual leadership is essential to facilitating school improvement for the processes that lead to greater student achievement and student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). To further illustrate this point, national leadership institutes have been expanded and established to examine and provide direction to school districts on this very matter. The Wallace Foundation has laid the foundation for groundbreaking site-based research that is informing districts across the United States on how to better prepare and retain high quality school leaders (Wallace Foundation, 2015). In addition, the renowned Broad Center has also developed programs aimed at recruiting, training, and supporting leadership talent from across America to transform urban school systems (Broad Center, 2015). The Harvard Principals' Center continues its distinguished work in researching best practices for providing professional development to increase

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school leaders' efficacy (Harvard Principals' Center, 2015). Closer to home, the Omaha Public Schools is currently working with the philanthropic community to develop and fund a "Principal Pipeline" preparation program for identifying proven leaders and preparing them for leading meaningful school improvement in OPS schools. The program would identify, recruit, train, and mentor aspiring principals to ensure there is a viable pipeline of strong leaders. Hillsborough Public Schools in Tampa, Florida currently has a similar program that includes pre-service training, selective hiring, and on the job evaluation and support for prospective and recently hired building leaders (Hillsborough County Public Schools, 2015).

According to Elmore and Burney (2000), the recruiting and retaining of quality leaders is one of the most important decisions a superintendent can make during his or her tenure. However, with increased job stress and complexity, Gates et al. also found in 2006 that the retirement and attrition of the current principal workforce continues to accelerate and will continue to do so in the next 10-20 years. This transition of principals provides school districts with an opportunity to grow as an organization and an opportunity to diversify its leadership ranks. Therefore, as we continue to look for ways to increase the effectiveness of principals across the board, attention must also be paid to the diversity of those leaders.

Summary of Findings

Although the passage of the Civil Rights Act almost five decades ago may lead some to believe that racial disparities are harder to find in general society, racial disparities in educational leadership continue to persist. According to employment statistics from the 2010 Equal Opportunity Employment Commission, minorities constitute nine-percent of

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what are considered “senior level” educational positions. This percentage includes superintendents and assistant/associate superintendents. School level leaders are referred to in the commission’s work as “midlevel managers” and minorities make up 16% of this category. However, as reported during the fall of 2014, the United States will become a “majority minority” public school nation. This means that as a country the overall number of Latino, African American, and Asian students in public K-12 classrooms is expected to surpass the number of non-Hispanic whites (Maxwell, 2014). These figures provide the underpinnings for the significance of the recruitment and retention of African American and Latino school administrators.

It is important to note that wide-ranging diversity in school level leadership positions has meaningful links that go way beyond just a portrayal of fairness or equality. There is research to support a positive relationship between minority representation of principals and student outcomes. These outcomes include academic achievement, lower drop out rates, and higher graduation rates specifically for minority students (Dee, 2004; Villegas & Irvine, 2010). Therefore, there are both symbolic and practical reasons why the presence of minorities in school leadership is important (Williams & Loeb, 2012). African American and Latino school administrators have the proven potential to positively influence the student achievement and climates of school communities. These leaders are able not only to help students navigate their school environment and culture, but also to increase the involvement of other teachers and their students' parents. For this reason, those charged with leading 21st Century school districts must find ways to attract, recruit, and

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retain these valuable leaders while at the same time staying within the boundaries set forth by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC).

An Examination of Recruitment and Retention Practices

Many school districts have enacted and adopted policies related to the recruitment of a more diverse teaching field. This action, if successful, will indirectly impact the pool of qualified participants for administrative positions. In other words, school districts across the nation are realizing that recruiting staff and administrators who bring greater racial and ethnic diversity to schools will strengthen their students and their communities.

One of the main avenues school districts must examine is related to minority teacher recruitment and the connection to minority principal recruitment. Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reveal a low percentage of minority teachers relative to minority students (NCES, 2011). The number of minority students in public schools between the school years 1999-00 and 2007-08 increased from 39% to 45%. However, the number of minority teachers only increased from 15% to 17%. More recent figures from 2011-2012 demonstrate that 82% of 3.4 million public school teachers were white, while 7% were black, and 8% were Hispanic (NCES, 2014). The United States experienced an increase in the representation of minority teachers, but the representation of minority students increased by a higher rate. This perpetuates the disparity between students and teachers. Since teaching is a prerequisite for principal jobs in almost all fifty states (Gates et al., 2003), the underrepresentation of minorities in teaching implies that racial and ethnic minorities are underrepresented in the pool of potential principals and may lead to a similar mismatch between principals and students. More simply reinforced,

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99% percent of all public school principals have some teaching experience. Therefore, in order to understand and address the minority principal shortage, one must also examine the minority teacher shortage (Williams & Loeb, 2012).

In addition, a study by Williams and Loeb in 2012 explored the “same race principal effect” on promotion of teachers of color to leadership positions and found that African American teachers are more likely to pursue careers in school leadership when they have worked under African American principals. This is a significant finding as districts work to promote more African American teachers to enter the administrative arena.

Expanding the recruitment pool. When considering the need to recruit school administrators from diverse backgrounds, the question many school districts in the mid-west face is “How do we cast a wider net?” Districts that have found the most success comes from establishing a nationwide recruiting strategy that includes specific techniques to recruit African American and Latino candidates. In his article “Stepping up to Diversity Recruiting” author Frank McCarthy (2003) gives business, health, and educational arena leaders’ ten keys to successful diversity recruiting. These keys include making a high level mandate on the importance of diversity recruiting, tying all recruiting to established strategic goals, and getting input from local stakeholders. In addition, a crucial key listed in his work is related to casting a wider net and suggestions include:

- (i) Advertising job vacancies on national websites and national publications, including career websites, national newspapers, education publications, and periodicals targeting African American and Latino communities;

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(ii) Recruiting at Historically Black Colleges and Universities, the Hispanic

Association of Colleges and Universities, and other colleges and universities with teacher preparation programs serving significant numbers of African American and/or Latino students including providing vacancy announcements to campus career services offices;

(iii) Attending local and state-wide job, diversity, and education fairs and/or expos.

One does not have to look far to find examples of metropolitan areas that are working to address this issue. The University of Northern Iowa has partnered with local school districts and introduced its “Minorities in the Leadership of Education” program within the last three years. Qualifying students receive tuition assistance and mentoring as they pursue certification as school administrators or seek doctoral degrees in education (Stegmeir, 2014). School districts looking to increase the number of diverse school leaders should examine how to expand their recruitment pool, thereby giving themselves additional options for locating the most highly qualified candidates. This may require districts to step away from the traditional recruitment techniques in favor of more targeted recruitment efforts that tap a more diverse pipeline.

Principal preparation and alternate pathways to administrative certification.

Although significant, focused recruitment is only one component from a list of best practices for increasing African American and Latino school leaders, state identified credentials for educational leadership positions play an important role in the transition from teacher to principal. This is because 49 out of 50 states require prospective principals to obtain some sort of credential (Williams & Loeb, 2012.) The development of multiple

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pathways to school leadership such as alternative licensure and preparation, teacher-leader certification, and alternative principal preparation programs should be a focus area for districts and states looking to increase the number of African American and Latino school administrators. Research points to the notion that states should not depend on one pathway for principal licensure; a lack of pathways can result in potential leadership talent being overlooked or underutilized (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007).

Examination of an alternate pathway for individuals with graduate degrees in other fields (while also possessing teacher certification) would be a step in the right direction. Looking only at those who complete the traditional university preparation program can create a restrictive candidate pool. This could potentially lead to districts unintentionally perpetuating a more homogenous pool and neglecting to recognize others who may have experiences that better prepare them to lead schools and significantly accelerate student motivation and achievement.

States and districts have been stepping up to the plate to meet this challenge since 2001. For example, the New Jersey Expedited Certification for Educational Leadership (NJ EXCEL) emerged as a response to the shortage of highly qualified principal applicants across the state. The NJ EXCEL team also identified a serious lack of diversity among the highly qualified candidates. The program's mission is to increase, diversify, and improve the caliber of the school leader candidate pool in New Jersey by providing innovative, high-quality preparation in expedited pathways to certification for principals and other school administrators (NJ EXCEL, 2015). Multiple states have similar pathways. In 2002 a law was passed in the state of Florida that gives the state's 67 local school boards authority

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to set their own alternative qualifications for persons wishing to become principals who do not hold a state certificate (National Center for Education Information, 2015).

Culturally proficient interviewing and hiring practices. In the arena of business, white men are twice as likely to get management jobs as equally qualified black men and three times as likely as black women (Childs, 2012). It should come as no surprise that school districts have the potential to also either positively or negatively influence the racial composition of their school leaders; the individuals in charge of hiring practices for the district frequently control this influence. According to recent research, in their attempts to attract and hire the highest quality candidates, some districts' hiring practices are actually hindering their applicant pool and the district's ability to attract the best candidates (Clifford, 2012). Although blatant racial discrimination actions may be at times to blame, more often well-intentioned district human resource leaders employ less obvious, but still unproductive, methods that deter administrators of color from seeking employment in certain districts (Williams & Loeb, 2012). Diverse applicants can be discounted in the interviewing process because they are "different" and possess possibly dissimilar cultural norms. Research done back in 1991 by Biernat, Manis, and Nelson demonstrates another example of a hiring bias that exists. These researchers found that when human resource administrators (in the business realm) were rating the quality of verbal skills as indicated by vocabulary definitions, evaluators rated the skills lower if they were told an African American provided the definitions than if they were told that a white person provided them.

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There is a danger in assuming that cultural, racial, ethnic, and gender biases are nonexistent in human resource screening and hiring processes. Research does not support that notion. It is important to teach individuals in charge of hiring about the subconscious biases they may have, and figure out a way to change these patterns. Embracing culturally proficient hiring practices require that the district view diversity as a way to enhance the organization's overall mission and vision.

Retention practices. No matter how effective a district is at attracting and hiring more diverse candidates, it is impossible to achieve the overall objectives without giving serious consideration to those same candidates' retention. Recruitment is only the first half of the challenge. While describing a study he conducted in 2011 entitled *Recruitment, Retention and the Minority Teacher Shortage* (and co-authored with Henry May), Richard Ingersoll told the Pacific Standard (a well-known publication company in southern California) in an interview:

“There's been a victory for recruitment but not a victory for retention. If we want to solve this minority teaching shortage that's been long discussed, then there's going to have to be more focus on retention. We're hiring more minority teachers but also losing more of them. It's like a leaky bucket.” (p.4)

As established in the previous section, any loss in minority teachers presents a serious decrease in the diverse school leadership pool. A focus on the retention of diverse school leaders is embedded in a district-wide effort for an inclusive organizational climate that promotes the importance of diversity in leadership ranks.

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Mentorship programs. A growing body of research suggests that access to mentoring and district sponsored informal social networks may improve mobility for African American and Latino educators within school leadership (Tillman 2005; Magdaleno, 2006). The most important study published recently in this regard examined the increasing Latino population within California public schools and explored the implementation and sustainment of a same-race administrator-mentoring program. The program was enacted due to the shortage of Latino school administrators (and superintendents) in California when compared to the percentage of Latino students attending California schools. The program focused on both the growth rate and retention rate of Latino administrators (Magdaleno, 2006). Districts and states looking to enhance their leadership diversity levels and “grow their own” minority administrators can look to this study for experiential lessons learned and points of interest.

Implications of Findings and Application to Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC)

Implications of Findings

Choosing new leaders to lead school buildings through the 21st Century is a complex and challenging task. There is an increased demand for high-quality principals from diverse backgrounds to serve changing demographic backgrounds of students and families. The recruitment and sustained retention of topnotch effective diverse school leaders should be on the “to do list” of any superintendent within or surrounding an urban center in the United States. The ability to live and work side by side with people of all backgrounds is a goal for all students in every school district. A highly skilled diverse building leadership staff will provide school districts with the needed foundation to fulfill this goal and promote student success.

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Applications to Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC)

If the number of African American and Latino candidates available for administrative positions in the metro area is to be increased, greater attention must be paid to recruitment and retention of not only administrators of color but teachers of color as well. Based on a review of the research, districts who have successfully met this challenge have enacted deliberate strategies to expand their recruitment pool, forge partnerships with higher education institutions and non-profits to establish alternate pathways to certification and preparation, examine their hiring practices for cultural proficiency, analyze their current retention practices, and implement meaningful mentorship programs for minority administrators.

The Metropolitan Omaha Educational Consortium (MOEC) offers an opportunity for MOEC superintendents and their corresponding districts to benefit from a coordinated and strategic approach in this direction. By working together to develop a pipeline of highly skilled and well-prepared diverse principals, all MOEC districts will improve their ability to meet the growing heterogeneous needs of their student population.

Working together, MOEC superintendents may consider establishing a focused and strategic plan for addressing the shortage of minority administrators. A visionary plan that carefully adheres to all fair employment practice laws would assist district leaders in guiding policies and programs to recruit, retain, and promote a diverse, highly qualified workforce for the Omaha metro area schools. Without a coordinated strategic approach, there will continue to be well intentioned but ineffective efforts carried out by compassionate and committed school district leaders.

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Author's Information

Andrea Haynes is currently the Principal of Harrison Elementary with the Omaha Public Schools, Omaha, NE. She has served as an Elementary Principal for three years. Prior, she served as an assistant principal, central office administrator and began her career teaching in the district's early childhood program. In addition to these roles, she has also served on various local community-based committees and boards. She is currently completing her Ed.D. in Educational Leadership at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.