

Keynote Address
Connecticut State Conference of NAACP Branches
HBCUs and Minority Teacher Recruitment Summit

Thursday, December 1, 2016

Yale Law School Auditorium

6:00 PM

By

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Good evening Mr. Esdaile, Mrs. Dumas, Superintendent Mayo, National Teacher of the Year, elected officials, members of the NAACP, fellow educators, ladies and gentlemen, I bring you greetings from Hampton University, where I have had the pleasure of serving as president for the past 39 years. During my nearly 40 year tenure, I have been a strong advocate, not just for Hampton, but for all HBCUs. A graduate of Talladega College, in Alabama, and Harvard, I am a living example of the positive impact that HBCUs can have on an individual's personal life and professional career. That is why I made the choice to dedicate my time, talent, energy, and treasure to Hampton University and the HBCU community as a whole. This was a conscious decision even though I could have stayed at Harvard as an administrative officer, or accepted one of the numerous offers that I have received over the years to work at a majority institution. I made this choice because I recognized the deep and rich history of HBCUs and the profound contributions they make to educating black, white, brown and red people, uplifting the race, and changing our communities for the better.

My professional career began as a high school history teacher in Florida. When I began teaching in 1965, it was a common fact that Black students were taught by Black teachers who lived and worked in Black communities. These teachers were often the pillars of the community and well-respected by all. During this time, the majority of these teachers attended HBCUs because HBCUs were primarily the only option for them. That landscape has changed now. Today, HBCUs are not the only option for African Americans when it comes to obtaining a college degree.

What is true and has become a significant challenge for some HBCUs is that many high school guidance counselors channel minority students to majority colleges because their world view is that the formerly segregated institutions that did not want people of color in the past, such as universities in Mississippi, Alabama, Georgia and Virginia, now accept black students. Therefore, they reason that there is no need for the Tougaloo, Talladega, Spelman, Fisk and Morehouses to exist. This type of thinking is as absurd as that of some minority parents who send their children to majority schools because they think that it brings prestige to the parents. As a result of this faulty logic, many are choosing to attend majority institutions.

Yet, a recent Gallup poll shows that “Black graduates of HBCUs are more likely than African American graduates of other institutions to be thriving—strong, consistent and progressing – in a number of areas of their lives, particularly in their financial and purpose well-being. The thriving gap between African American graduates of HBCUs and African American graduates of other schools is the largest in financial well-being, which gauges how effectively people are managing their economic lives to reduce stress and increase security. Four in 10 African American

HBCU graduates (40%) are thriving in this area, compared with fewer than three in 10 (29%) Black graduates of other schools.”

According to the results of the survey, 55 % of African American HBCU graduates “strongly agreed” that their college or university “prepared them well for life outside of college,” compared to less than 30% of non-HBCU African American graduates. About half of African American HBCU graduates said their college or university was “the perfect school” for them, compared to 34 % of non-HBCU African American alumni. Nearly half also said they couldn’t “imagine a world” without the HBCU they attended. Only 25 % of African American graduates of predominantly white institutions agreed. So contrary to the belief of many, African American graduates of HBCUs fare quite well in life.

These statistics not-with-standing, most African American students entering college are choosing not to enter the education profession. Today's college students seem to view other professions as being more exciting, glamorous, and lucrative. For an example, the Princeton Review cites computer science, communications, business, biology, and psychology as 5 of the top ten majors for college students. Education is nowhere to be found on the list. When education is selected as a major, it is generally not selected by African Americans. According to the Department of Education, only 5% of African American college students major in Education. The majority of college students enrolled in teacher education programs are white. When comparing completion rates for all groups enrolled in these programs, whites have a 73% completion rate after 6 years and African Americans have a 42% completion rate after 6 years. Based on these

numbers, it follows, then, that the vast majority of teachers who teach our students are no longer Black, but White.

In my opinion, these shifts have not fared well for the African American community, neither for our HBCUs, nor for our nation. According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (2014), 50.3% of students in K-12 are minorities. Yet, only 7.6% of the teachers are African American. The numbers are even more astonishing when it comes to African American male teachers who make up only 1.7% of the teacher population. The Department of Education reports that 82% of public school teachers are white. There is an obvious need for more African American teachers.

A recent report produced by The Education Trust indicates that research has shown “Teachers of color bring benefits to the classroom beyond content knowledge and pedagogy.” They serve as “role models, parental figures, and advocates.” In addition, they “enhance cultural understanding among white colleagues, teachers and students.” These are but a few of the reasons that more African American teachers are needed in our nation’s classrooms. I’m sure that many of you in the audience this evening can attest to the importance of having teachers who look like you. If you are African American, it is likely that you can attribute some part of your success to a particular teacher who believed in you and made you believe in yourself. More likely than not, that teacher was also African American. Please know that I am in no way negating the importance nor impact that White teachers may have on African American students. I am merely stressing what research has proven—there exists a special connection between African American teachers

and African American students that often results in students feeling “safe” to meet the high expectations that teachers set. (The Education Trust).

The Department of Education report also cites the benefits of having more African American teachers in the classroom. According to them, “Teachers of color are positive role models for all students in breaking down negative stereotypes and preparing students to live and work in a multiracial society.” They further suggest that “the racial diversity of teaching workforce can help close the achievement gap.” When “compared to their peers, teachers of color are more likely to have: 1. Higher expectations of students of color; 2. Confront issues of racism; 3. Serve as advocates; and 4. Develop more trusting relationships with students.”

Everyone seems to agree that teachers of color are important to the American education system. So, one of the questions before us is “How do we recruit more African American teachers?” People have been talking about the need for more African American teachers for decades, but not enough is done about it. I have several suggestions that are not necessarily original with me.

First of all, one method for recruiting teachers, in general, is marketing the profession and schools systems appropriately. Rarely have I seen a commercial, print ad or other materials that promote the teaching profession. I believe that this is a missed opportunity. In my opinion, teaching is not always viewed as a career option because it is not marketed as such. We simply rely on individuals to be somehow drawn to teaching and do not market it as a viable option. Research by the National Education Association has shown that individuals who are attracted to a teaching career have the following in common: 1.They desire to work with young people; 2.They

value education in society; 3.They are interested in subject matter; 4.They seek job security; and 5.They appreciate self-growth. Each of these can be a tenant of a massive marketing campaign for teachers. Along with general marketing campaigns, there should also be campaigns directed toward African Americans that encourage teaching as a career.

Secondly, although marketing efforts are important, in my opinion, we can recruit more African American teachers by going to the source. Currently, although HBCUs comprise approximately 3 percent of the nation's colleges/universities, they produce 50% of the nation's African American teachers. Based on these statistics, I am of the opinion that the best way to increase the number of African American teachers is by partnering with and investing in teacher education programs at HBCUs, where 16% of all African American teacher candidates are enrolled.

Thirdly, the overall teacher shortage and the minority teacher shortage are national issues. Therefore, federal funding should be designated for and invested in high quality teacher education programs, particularly those at HBCUs where the majority of minority teachers are educated. These investments should include scholarship dollars for students interested in the teaching profession as well as grant funds for faculty members who are engaged in educational research. These investments should also include funding to provide test preparation services, as many students have some difficulty passing standardized teaching exams such as the PRAXIS I and PRAXIS II, which are required by most states for licensure. At Hampton, we have a Student Success Center in our Department of Education that offers teacher candidates testing skills and

strategies as well as provides mock examinations to better prepare them for teacher licensure exams.

Fourthly, in addition to federal funding, I would like to see foundations, or a consortium of foundations, come together to make increasing the number of African American teachers a priority. For an example, why not have several foundations come together, as has been done before, and allocate \$100 million for teacher preparation programs at HBCUs. The bulk of these funds would go toward student scholarships. If a student is interested in studying computer science, business, engineering and other high profile endeavors, more than likely scholarship funds are available. This is not true for students interested in teaching. Think where the engineers, business men and women, and scientists would be without teachers. Teachers are the foundation of the promotion of learning.

You should know that I believe in putting my money where my mouth is. As an example, in recognition of the importance of teachers in the African American community, my wife and I donated a million dollars to Hampton to establish a scholarship for students enrolled in the teacher preparation program from the cities of Hampton and the nearby Newport News community.

As the title of this summit indicates, HBCUs are a “proven resource” and a “viable option in minority teacher recruitment.” Therefore, my fifth recommendation is for school systems and agencies seeking African American teachers to establish relationships with HBCUs and create a pipeline that allows them to recruit the teachers that these institutions prepare.

I am confident that the deans of education at HBCUs would more than welcome the opportunity to have as many school districts as possible to recruit their graduates. They would love for districts to actually be involved in the teacher preparation process at their institutions. When recent graduates are recruited and enjoy their experiences, they reach out to their peers who have not yet completed their programs to encourage them to seek employment in their school districts. This can create a steady flow of African American teachers from HBCUs to specific school districts.

Now this might seem fairly simple, and sometimes it is. New teachers are always excited to enter the teaching workforce. According to a study conducted by the Flora Family Foundation, since the 1980s, the number of elementary and secondary minority teachers has almost doubled. The study also reported that the number of minority teachers entering the profession was twice that of white teachers entering the profession. Such data would make one wonder how, then, we can have a minority teacher shortage. I submit to you that the shortage is not primarily based on the recruitment of teachers, but also the retention of teachers. Let's take a few minutes to discuss why African American teachers do not remain in the profession.

According to the American Federation of Teachers (2016), as a group, minority teachers are leaving the teaching profession at a higher rate than other teachers. Because most minority teachers are placed in high poverty urban schools, many would assume that they are leaving the profession because of the student population, but the real reasons they are leaving are related to the working conditions in the schools. The American Federation of Teachers study reports that most minority teachers who leave the profession complain primarily about two things: 1. not having a voice in educational decisions that affect them; and 2. not having professional autonomy in the classroom. Based on the Education Trust report, these teachers also complain that: 1. there are

few opportunities for advancement; and 2. they aren't respected by students, peers, parents, and administrators and are often viewed as "subpar educators".

Another reason for their leaving the profession is placement. Minority teachers are two to three times more likely than white teachers to be placed in hard-to-staff, low-income, predominately minority, urban school settings. When minority teachers are placed in majority schools, they encounter isolation, negative perceptions and performance pressures. Both settings tend to be difficult and discourage minority teachers from remaining in the profession.

Now that we know some of the reasons minority teachers choose to leave the teaching profession, we are better able to answer the question, "How do we retain African American teachers?" As you may have already guessed, I also have some thoughts about this, too.

Just as it is with colleges and universities, getting people in is only half of the battle; you must be able to keep them in order to achieve success. With that said, my first thought is that once recent graduates and newly certified teachers are recruited, they must be treated with respect. Secondly, there should be tools in place to create a smooth transition for them into the teaching workforce. The majority of teachers who leave the profession do so within their first few years of service. Therefore, the experiences of new teachers entering the workforce are critical to their remaining in the profession.

Personally, I am an advocate for mentorship. During my almost 40 year tenure as President of Hampton, I have mentored countless individuals both at Hampton and at other institutions. Seventeen of my administrators have gone on to become presidents of colleges, universities and organizations. This was possible because I was willing to share my knowledge and experiences with them as well as help them to be successful for their current roles and prepare

them for future promotions. I believe that identifying veteran teachers to mentor new minority teachers would help with retaining minority teachers in the profession.

By being paired with a veteran teacher, new teachers have a valuable resource to help them adjust to their new roles and responsibilities. The veteran teacher can show the new teacher the ropes as well as provide guidance on handling specific situations that may be encountered. This would be a non-adversarial situation because the veteran teacher would not be responsible for evaluating the new teacher. The veteran teacher would simply serve as a support system, offer advice, share knowledge and experiences, as well as strategies for success. Having a veteran teacher as a mentor would likely give new teachers a sense of being heard, more confidence, and increase their commitment to teaching, which will likely result in their remaining in the field longer.

As previously stated, much of what I have shared is not new; it is just not being done as well and as often as it could be. I will be the first to admit that increasing the number of minority teachers is no simple task. There is much to be considered and even more to be done when tackling this mammoth task. However, I am one who believes that instead of cursing the darkness, one should light a candle. In summary, my opinion is that the best way to illuminate the importance of recruiting and retaining African American teachers in our classrooms is by:

- Marketing the profession of teaching appropriately;
- Investing public and private funds in HBCUs, the colleges that produce most of our nation's African American teachers;
- Investing in the students who enroll in HBCU teacher education programs by providing them with scholarship dollars;
- Establishing partnerships between districts and teacher preparation programs;

- Treating new teachers with respect; and
- Implementing mentoring programs that will help them adjust to their new roles.

We know the issues, we know the challenges, we know the problems and promises.

Ladies and gentlemen, we have a lot of work to do. "Let's get on with it!"