

The Best for Kids Requires Staff Diversity

THE DIVERSITY of a school's staff directly impacts our children's education by providing perspectives that add depth and understanding.

Identifying educators of diverse backgrounds for leadership roles benefits students of all races and creates an understanding of the needs and aspirations of all groups. Diversity prepares all children for the world they will live in after they leave school.

Why haven't all school districts recognized the value of staff diversity and committed to ensuring their hiring practices reflect that value? Claiming that diverse candidates are hired but "don't work out" is not an acceptable excuse.

Those of us who have benefited

from the existing system must understand and be empathetic to the predicament of those who have not, but that is not sufficient. Feeling guilty about a broken system helps no one. Apologizing for a system we have inherited is self-serving. Placing blame diverts attention from a larger culture of institutional racism.

Examining Causes

The path forward requires substantive actions by people with the authority to act. The appropriate approach to a failed diversity initiative is to identify the underlying causes of the failure objectively. Are there institutional practices that protect a process from change? If so, why wasn't a new path

created? Should people who understand the proper way to move forward be brought in as partners? Was transparency in the process hindered?

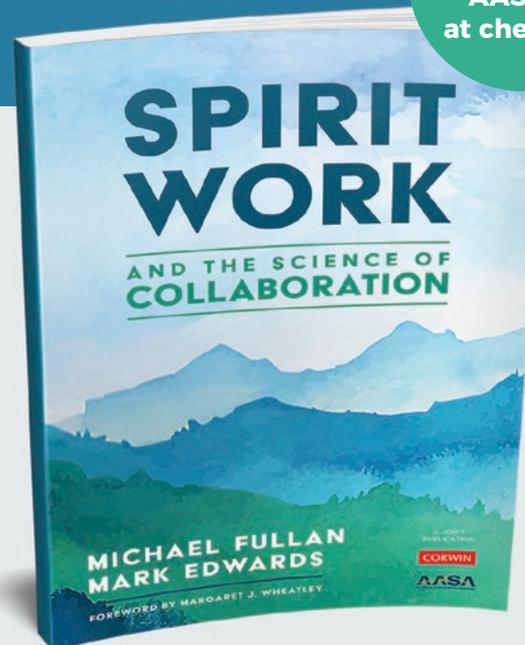
“Placing blame DIVERTS ATTENTION from a larger culture of institutional racism.”

Regrettably, the failure of the recruitment initiative may be attributable to institutional racism that preserves the existing culture. Systemic racism often is codified in institutional practices over many decades and is not always readily recognized by current participants.

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A HOPEFUL FUTURE BEGINS WITH AN ASPIRATIONAL VISION

This contributes to implicit bias and fewer opportunities for mentoring and advancement for more recently hired teachers and administrators of diverse cultural backgrounds, according to the National Center for Suburban Studies at Hofstra University in a study, “Teacher Diversity in Long Island’s Public Schools.”

Moving forward means addressing the lack of diversity directly and collaboratively, by trying again when a diversity initiative fails the first time. Organizations must implement what they learn with each failure to succeed on the next attempt. Every initiative will not meet with success, and each individual hired will create her or his own path. That is part of the process. One failure does not define a candidate or the institution, but the response to that failure does.

Joint Solutions

Educational institutions must work toward being places that welcome and support diverse candidates. That happens when cultures change. During the hiring process, diverse candidates themselves must feel they are welcome and appreciated. Organizations accomplish this through words and actions by partnering with a local NAACP and then making diverse hires. Statements supporting diversity followed by symbolically celebrating advocates of past structural racism only corrodes credibility.

The quantifiable outcome of increased diversity will be a deeper pool of candidates, which leads to better candidates.

Diversity must include equitable opportunities for all groups and respect for all ideas. Then perhaps we will realize there is more for us to agree on than disagree. Through collaboration, we identify solutions.

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