

1. Hispanic Female - Director of Programs

I sit at some high-level tables that have the potential to influence and inform decisions that impact our district. More often than not, I am one of few people of color – women of color at that – in the space. I know my voice is important to ensure the experiences and needs of underrepresented communities are heard, yet there are times when I feel my voice is silenced. At a recent committee meeting, I offered an idea and it went unacknowledged, yet the same idea was heard and even championed when it came from a white women. I know that I must speak up, but it is experiences like these that keep those internal barriers intact. I can feel my temperature rising, and my heart beat faster when I have something to say, but I'm also thinking, "Does it even matter? I won't be heard anyway." And, then I silence myself.

2. African American Male Principal

I was called to a meeting for schools that are on state's watch list. I looked around the room and quickly noticed that all the principals were black, but the supervisors in the room were white. I had a sinking feeling that we were being singled out. I know some white principals who 'mail it in' on a daily basis, yet they were not in the room. So, here I was being told I was in need of improvement, along with all my black colleagues. Was this just a coincidence or is there a conspiracy against black leaders? Is the game to put us in the low performing schools and wait for us to fail?

3. Hispanic Male – Professional Development Trainer

A district we worked with had massive demographic shifts over the last five years – moving from primarily white to Latino. I was with a white co-trainer, working with three school leadership teams (92% white and 8% Latino). The white co-trainer described the changing demographics as, "Our communities are changing. I get it. Now, we have kids who can't speak the language. Now, we have kids who get their electricity from an extension cord connected to their neighbor's house. Now, we have kids who live with multiple families in one home. How can we expect them to do homework?" The trainees' heads nodded in agreement.

4. African American Male Principal Supervisor

I always think I am one step away from losing my job. I have to be on point and can't slip up. I'm always analyzing things through the lens of race. I can't help it. I'm always looking to see if there is a hidden meaning. I found myself talking with a group of black principals the other day after a principal meeting and one of them said, "We should probably split up or they will think we are conspiring".

5. White Female Board Member

Last year we hired the first African-American superintendent in our district. I was so proud of our selection and excited about the prospects that this new leader would bring to our system. As board members, we believed having a leader of color would be a positive role model for our children and make a positive impact on our data. As the school year began I started getting calls from some of our white female principals who said they were being harassed by our superintendent. They said he was yelling at them and they were feeling threatened. When I discussed this with the superintendent, he said he was only asking them about their data and holding them accountable for results.

6. African American Male Board Member

When I enter into a circumstance, I scan the room to see what the racial make-up in the room is. I understand, my race enters the room before my intellect enters. If I am the only black man, I feel a need to represent all black men. How do I ensure that my perspective is heard and respected? Do I have enough credentials and respect in the room, or will I have to fight for it? I feel a responsibility to ensure the black leaders are successful in our district. We have so few.

7. Hispanic Female Principal

Last year I was appointed to lead one of the failing schools in our district. I had been very successful in my previous principalship and was energized by the opportunity to turnaround a struggling school. The superintendent said the turnaround schools were the priority of the district. I believed her and expected a "all hands on deck" level of support from district office. It is now October 1st and I have 5 teacher vacancies still unfilled. How is this an "all hands on deck"? How can I move the needle on achievement with 5 vacancies? I am disillusioned and disappointed.

8. White Male Principal

In my first year as a principal, I was assigned to a middle school with a predominately African-American student population. One of my first tasks was to hire an AP. The last three APs at the school had been African-American men. District leaders told me it would be wise to hire an African American to fill the role. It was made clear to me from parents and community members that they expected me to hire an African-American AP and would not accept anything else. As I talked with teachers (most of whom were white) they also believed that the new AP needed to be an African American "so the kids would stay in line". Perhaps the most blunt input came the front office staff, all who were middle aged white women, when they said, "You have to hire a big black man to keep these kids in control".