



Scholarship Contest Winner

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Essay Topic: Describe a problem facing your community and explain how you would help address or solve it. Discuss the impact your solution could have on others.

As an elementary-aged student, I had great respect for teachers. Even as a Senior in high school, I seek to build authentic bonds with my teachers and professors, often desiring their approval, advice, and companionship. I saw many of my classmates easily developing familial-type bonds with our teachers, but I was never able to see myself in my teachers the way my classmates did. It wasn't until I was older that I realized this seemingly small disconnect was rooted in a larger issue: I didn't have a Black teacher with whom I could bond through shared experiences and perspectives.

The lack of diversity in education is an issue that many students face. When a student, specifically a student of color, does not see themselves among the adult population around them, it can lead to a sense of isolation and unbelonging. It is important that a student of color has an adult, specifically a teacher, they can go to who understands them and has a shared cultural experience. Growing up, I knew my teachers ultimately wanted the best for me, but aside from academically, I often didn't feel supported, even though they were doing their best.

One of the negative impacts of this lack of diversity is the identity and self-confidence of the student. When a student of color sees a teacher who is of the same race or culture, it may have a positive effect on the student. The student will feel that they are also able to succeed and that their culture is not a barrier to success. Without representation at school, I was left feeling like people who looked like me weren't capable of being smart like my teachers - ultimately diminishing my idea of who I was.

The lack of diversity in teaching staff can also have a real impact on the classroom environment. Diversity brings different perspectives, teaching styles, and cultural knowledge that benefit all students, not just those who share their background. These teachers can help broaden discussions and help influence a more inclusive curriculum that prepares students to enter a diverse and interconnected world.

To create a diverse workforce requires intentional efforts. There are a number of concrete things that could be done with recruitment, support, and creating unconventional pathways to certification.

As a film and marketing major, I would create an "I See Me" campaign, specifically targeting Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Minority-Serving Institutions (MSIs). It would also market to middle- and high school students. I would highlight the school and the community with interviews from students, parents, and other staff talking about the need for diverse educators. Through the use of short-form video and social media, this approach would help address the immediate problem and create interest in potential future teachers.

Ultimately, doing a better job of "selling" teaching or education as a career path will open students' minds to the possibility. Seeing people that look like them and hearing from students who need them could be pivotal for some on the fence. Marketing and an intentional narrative paired with real programs and incentives would go a long way.

Every student deserves to feel seen, understood, and inspired in their classroom. Increasing diversity is about more than representation - it's about connection and creating a space where all students can thrive.

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