

Closing the Equity Gap in Front of the Classroom

Shady Hill and Morehouse College team up to increase diversity of its teachers

One Thursday in March four visiting Morehouse College students walked into Betsy Leahy's third-grade classroom, and immediately an African-American boy made a beeline for LeAnthony Freeman. Standing nearby, smiling up at the tall man in a kufi—a cap many Muslim men wear—he was rewarded by a gentle fist-bump. The little boy beamed.

This boy's thirst to connect with someone who looked like him was palpable. It's no secret to educators that having more teachers who look like the children in school is a critical component to reaching every child's potential. Having just one black teacher in third, fourth or fifth grade reduced low-income black boys' probability of dropping out of high school by 39 percent, a key 2017 academic study found.¹



Morehouse College students Keylen Lyons, LeAnthony Freeman, Terrence McQueen, and Zachary Lyncée sitting in SHS alum Lyncée's kindergarten classroom. The students were touring as part of a new effort to formally connect Shady Hill's Teacher Training Center to Morehouse.

The Shady Hill School has a long commitment to increasing staff and student diversity, but the challenges of attracting African Americans and men are well documented across the country. The need to develop high quality teachers is a burning issue for Shady Hill School's yearlong

¹ Gershenson, S., Hart, C.M.D., Lindsay, C.A., & Papageorge, N.W. (2017). The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers. IZA Institute of Labor Economics Discussion Paper No. 10630. <http://ftp.iza.org/dp10630.pdf>

teacher training program, which for 90 years has been bringing cohorts of diverse college graduates into SHS’s classrooms to work with master teachers and, of course, eager students.

But this year, SHS is upping the ante by creating a partnership with historically black Morehouse College, a brainchild of SHS Teacher Training Executive Director Desiree Ivey and Morehouse College President—and former SHS parent and Board Chair—David Thomas, and his wife, Willetta Lewis. The partnership was launched at a brunch Willetta and David hosted at the college’s Atlanta campus March 3, with Provost Michael E. Hodge promising to convene 50 students to “continue the conversation about their goals to teach and share resources to help them make their dreams a reality.”

“I am excited at the prospect of what SHS and Morehouse can do together,” said Thomas of creating a pipeline of Morehouse graduates for Teacher Training Center. “Over 25 percent of Morehouse students express an interest in education as a career. I know first hand the quality of teaching and learning at SHS.”

For three days, four Morehouse College students, along with Emerson College student Patrick Lessage and Babson College student Ethan Staes, had a special introduction to SHS’s unique school and a preview of the TTC. The students, mostly seniors, toured the school, met with teachers and administrators, spent time in classrooms and assemblies, and shadowed current SHS teacher apprentices one to one. The seeds were sown for the Morehouse students to apply for next year’s program, known nationwide as a leader in excellent teacher training through its distinctive combination of observation, supervised teaching, workshops, seminars, and continuous involvement in the life of the school, and partnerships with Boston University, Lesley University and Gardner Pilot Academy.

“I’m so impressed by the project-based learning,” said Dallas-born Keylen Lyons of SHS’s curriculum. He is definitely applying for the teacher program. Lyons (who is gender-non-conforming) is committed to elementary education and as a full-time student at Morehouse, and has already completed over 1,000 hours of in-class teaching, he said. “I see too much of education [in my Common Core-drive classrooms] being about getting the right answer on the test, and not about critical thinking,” said Lyons, who values the richness of letting students instead problem-solve on their own.

He and Lessage are very conscious of the need to have more teachers of color and male teachers as they pursue teaching. Patrick grew up in Cambridge and attended public schools, and is eager to get in the front of classrooms. Even in Cambridge schools, with a non-white population of sixty percent², Patrick said he could remember having only three teachers of color.

Morehouse senior Terrence McQueen’s mother, an elementary school teacher, is his inspiration for seeing the power of teaching, and his work in the Breakthrough teaching

² <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=00490000&orgtypecode=5&>

program is an example of his dedication to promoting education equity. He's weighing the SHS teaching program against other graduate programs at Columbia and Georgetown Universities after he graduates this year.

Also along for the visit was the only college junior, Morehouse student Zachary Lyncée, who acted as a liaison of sorts because he actually went to SHS. He got hugs from some teachers who remembered him as "such a cute tyke," and got a whiff of nostalgia when he saw paper mâché animals hovering overhead a kindergarten classroom. Zachary enforced the power of SHS's project-based learning and affirmed the strong message he got of "pushing yourself to be the best that you can be." "I took the Africa test about twenty times," he said, of the sixth-grade quiz of the 54 countries, "but I finally got 100 percent. It didn't matter how many times you tried. They just wanted you to learn that you can do it."

Freeman, who grew up in Buffalo, N.Y., has already launched a youth development organization in Atlanta (Y.A.L.E. Academy) while still at Morehouse. Freeman focuses on struggling urban youth through mentorship and a wide range of support services, based on his own struggles before he got himself into Morehouse. His visit to Shady Hill surprised him. He came to see the teaching techniques, he said, but saw something more.

"I have been focused on providing the people in my [organization's] community" leadership, tools, and role models, he said. "But I realized yesterday that what I do is needed in places like here"—a largely white community—"as well." Freeman's reflection enforced another finding in modern education policy: all children benefit from diversity in front of the classroom.

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