

Marilyn: I don't know. I wish I could, too.

Speaker 8: All good here.

Interviewer: All good? Okay. So, Marilyn-

Marilyn: Yes?

Interviewer: We had an interesting conversation with those all-black educators in the region. What did you hear?

Marilyn: I heard a lot of passion. A lot of personal investment in changing the system, the narrative that is playing out currently, with African-American kids not performing well, being disproportionately disciplined, and on the path to prison, or some other form of poverty, incarceration. I heard a lot of memories about what it was like for them growing up in school. Some teachers were taught by African-American teachers predominantly, and others never really had African-American teachers. And the difference that that made, and how important image is, and having role models is to a child in a school environment. I think that's highly underestimated, because the dominant population takes for granted, the culture is very dominant. It's white culture we live in, predominantly. And so, the need for role models doesn't seem like it's as pronounced as it is for ethnic groups, and particularly, black groups.

And so, I don't know exactly how to fix that, per se, but using the people that we do have in education, empowering the black educators, is really important. And one teacher said "We are the ambassadors for the profession, so if we ever hope to come to a place where we're raising up students to want to be educators, then we have to take our jobs really seriously, because we're advertising whether they want to do this work or not."

And so, it's really important not just for today, that we provide the supports that children need, and that teachers need to thrive. But we need to do it with a long vision, a long-term vision. What education is going to look like, and how students are going to feel in 20 years, when their children are coming to school. Will it be a place where they'll have fond memories? Will they want to stay in school? Will school be a place where kids feel like it's relevant? And feel like it's a path to a better life, or will they just decide it's not for me, and decide to go their own way? It's really important work we're doing.

Interviewer: Just real quick, this conversation, all of African-American educators, why is it important that we create a space like this? I just want you to reflect on what we did today.

Marilyn:

Our voices have been drowned out over the years. We know that teachers, black teachers, are disproportionately laid off when there's a layoff. We are not seen as the ideal candi- There have been studies. There was one recent study in Fairfax County, Virginia, about how discrimination is very present, in terms of hiring practices for school districts, particularly that school district. Where you can even be more qualified than a black candidate and still not get the, I'm sorry, than a white candidate, and still not get the job. I've seen that.

Me, I just resigned. The hardest part about resigning from my school was that I was the only African-American teacher in the building. And I had been for the past three years. So, that's not normal in a city like Chicago. And it's not okay. It's important for teachers to be able to say what is happening, and be honest about it. And this forum was perfect for that. For African-American teachers to say what they're going through, and know that we have traditionally been the gatekeepers for quality education for our community.

If we are not there, unfortunately, people who don't understand our community, don't understand our children, will make bad assumptions about what they need. They will perhaps not have the highest expectations for them, and sometimes sympathy actually comes in and it affects their ability to make proper decisions when its like, no, sometimes, you know, tough love is necessary. So, balancing those things, it's very nuanced. It's very cultural. And it's just important. Not to say that if you're not white, you can't do a great job with children, but diversity matters. I've never seen an all-white school, with all black teachers. But I've seen many, many, many all-black schools, with all-white teachers. So, there's a double standard there. And if it's not right to have it one way, then it's not right to have it the other way.

Interviewer:

Thank you.

Marilyn:

You're welcome. [inaudible 00:12:08]. Thank you.