Greetings!

This spring is leaving us with a lot to think about: educators scrambling to engage students remotely, budget cuts, the upcoming school year, and, as Dr. Tyrone Howard put it, “the never-ending reality that is racism in our country.” Not only have the adverse effects of this pandemic been disproportionately affecting Black and Latinx communities, but another set of Black deaths at the hands of police officers has been exposed. We know these issues are structural. They are part of a structure so old and ingrained that it’s invisible to many. So invisible, in fact, that rudimentary attempts to rectify the injustice are met with resistance and incredulity. But systems are created by people making a multitude of small decisions that form a whole. In this current moment of disruption, we have the opportunity to make different decisions, interrupt malevolent patterns, and make progress towards fixing inequitable systems like education.

*Paradigm Shift’s work* is focused on creating better opportunities for students of color by increasing the number of teachers of color. We support Black and Latinx paraeducators and teachers-on-waiver to become licensed teachers and help school administrators create more equitable and inclusive workplaces for a diverse staff. If paraeducators’ positions are eliminated by impending budget cuts, the children and families they support will suffer. Here’s why it’s so important to retain them.

**If paraeducators go, more than a job will be lost**

Families are suddenly lifting more weight in educating their children and need extra support to engage with the new educational environment. Paraeducators (paras) are helping them bridge the gaps by serving as a resource. “Paras have the capacity to address what is happening in the broader educational settings now,” says Marla Solomon, director of Five College Partnership Programs and of the Paradigm Shift project. “They have relationships. They can reach out on the phone. They speak the languages that parents speak in many cases.”

Cutting paraeducator positions could significantly reduce the racial and cultural diversity of the educational staff in a district, as paras are more diverse as a group than are teachers. Many paraeducators are working toward becoming licensed teachers.

**Resources for anti-racist learning and action**

Paradigm Shift is pleased to share the following resources to support educators striving to build anti-racist learning environments and communities.

**How to Root Out Anti-Black Racism from Your School**

UCLA Professor Tyrone C. Howard provides specific suggestions for school leaders in this article from *Education Week*. Dr. Howard writes regularly on topics of anti-racism and inclusion.

**Seeing White**

Unending racial inequity in schools, housing, criminal justice, and hiring. In truth, it’s an old story. Why? Where did the notion of “whiteness”
As districts prepare for budget reductions, we urge administrators to recognize both the importance of the paraeducator’s role and the inequities that will be exacerbated by cutting their jobs.

**Spotlight on paraeducator Isis Cotto: A bridge for parents, children**

After schools closed in March, Isis Cotto’s work became simultaneously amorphous—and more critical.

Normally, as a paraeducator, Isis assists the lead teacher on reading, writing, and math in a classroom with 12 children. Now Isis focuses on building bridges with parents and students who feel adrift, learning on their own at home.

Isis and the classroom teacher created an online portal to communicate with students and their parents. But Isis also picks up the phone to connect personally.

“What I’m trying to do with my parents is let them know we’re here,” she says, adding that she is helping parents to understand what is required of their children in this remote learning scenario. “I notice that when I talk to them and engage, they’ve been more involved in getting their kids’ work done,” she says. “I try to be that support for my parents. I’m asking people, are you okay? Is there something you need? And I try to reach the appropriate resource and get answers.”

Isis is a focal point of support. She lives in Springfield, as do her students. Roughly half of the children in Isis’s classroom speak Spanish, and Isis does too while the teacher does not, so Isis also works on outreach with the Spanish-speaking families. “I wish all teachers could have a para,” Isis says. “Having that second set of eyes and hands is very important to our children. We help make sure work is getting done and give children an avenue for communication. We’re another set of ears for children to vent and to trust.”

At 32, Isis holds a bachelor’s degree in elementary education and is working to become a licensed teacher, with support from Paradigm Shift.

**Positive feedback on March workshop**

Reprinted from Scene on Radio.

A deep dive into these questions, along with an array of leading scholars in this fourteen-part series.

**Rebuilding Community in Your School**

This guide from the Rennie Center can help leaders to rebuild their school communities when they reopen, with an eye to developing trust, identity, and inclusion.

**Scaffolded Anti-Racism Resources**

The goal of this document is to facilitate growth for white people to become allies and eventually accomplices for anti-racist work. Resources are organized by stages of white identity development so people can enter from their own starting point, and include podcasts, social media accounts to follow, books, and films.

**White Supremacy Culture in Organizations**

Tema Okun describes how our behavior in organizations has roots in white supremacy culture but can be shifted to be more inclusive and humane. For more on this topic, check out Dismantling Racism.

**Unconscious Bias: An Educators’ Self-Assessment**

From the Maryland State Education Association, this is a tool for educators to uncover their own unconscious biases.
We held a Ripple Effect Mapping workshop in early March to identify and understand how Paradigm Shift has made a difference to individuals, groups, institutions, the region, and the state. We heard overwhelming feedback that Paradigm Shift cares and is helping to strengthen access to learning and licensing.

“They are listening to our voices,” one participant said.

“When I started off, I was paying everything out of pocket, so this program was kind of big. Now we have (MTEL test) vouchers, and this is so helpful,” said another.

Administrators involved with Paradigm Shift said they have taken action to provide more support for Black and Latinx paras who want to become teachers and have changed their hiring processes to be more inclusive and equitable.

These and many similar responses help fuel us in our mission to support this pathway for increasing teacher diversity.

--Your friends at Paradigm Shift

Contact us

Visit our website