

What's in a Name? The Confluence of Confederate Symbolism and the Disparate Experiences of African American Students in a Central Virginia High School

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Abstract

In 2015-2016, news stories from Charleston, South Carolina, and the University of Missouri, among others, motivated and inspired many people to organize against assaults on the Black community generally and Black students in particular. Similarly, Black students at Robert E. Lee High School in Virginia have come together around what they perceive as racist symbolism and inequitable educational policies and practices. The Black student leaders at Robert E. Lee High School have presented their school principal with a list of demands. Meanwhile, the school's football and basketball teams, The Rebels, are threatening to go on strike until students' demands are addressed. This case study could be used in educational leadership graduate programs as well as curriculum and instruction coursework, especially in courses that emphasize social justice and ethical decision making. Particularly relevant courses might include School-Community Relations, Organizational Culture, Politics of Education, Contemporary Issues in Education, Visionary Planning and Strategies, and Schools as Learning Communities. In addition, this case study aligns with Standards 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 of the *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards* and can be integrated in leadership preparation programs accordingly. This case might also be used in school district-sponsored professional development workshops for current and/or aspiring administrators.

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Introduction and Review of Literature

The K-12 student body in the United States is becoming increasingly diverse, which poses implications in terms of equity, access, and social justice for schools and school leaders (Marshall & Olivia, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Implications include tackling the four types of racism, as *individual*, *cultural*, *institutional*, and *collective* that American students of color experience on a day-to-day basis (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013). Love (2016) states,

Race-centered violence kills Black children on a daily basis by either murdering them in the streets—taking their bodies, or murdering their spirits—taking their souls. Spirit murdering within a school context is the denial of inclusion, protection, safety, nurturance, and acceptance because of fixed, yet fluid and moldable, structures of racism. (p. 2)

Recurring manifestations of White supremacy in recent years have led many to more closely examine these various manifestations of racism in our society and schools. Furthermore, Dumas (2016) calls for an explicit recognition of what he refers to as “antiblackness” or the ontological position that makes individual, cultural, institutional, and collective racism possible. Dumas notes,

The aim of theorizing antiblackness is not to offer solutions to racial inequality, but to come to a deeper understanding of the Black condition within a context of utter contempt for, and acceptance of violence against the Black. (p. 13)

Dumas underscores the importance of first recognizing that while dismantling slavery did legally occur, it was not coupled with the social recognition of “Black citizenship and Human-ness” (and never has been since). Thus, “Black subjugation” is perpetually embedded in our culture, conjoined with the development of psyches and bodies, and enacted on the Black in material ways. Consequently, dismantling tracking, for example, is not enough to rid schools of racist practices. Rather, ending racism starts with recognizing that celebrating diversity, for instance, does not necessarily equate with the recognition that to be Black is to be “endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness.”¹

Current Educational-Political Context

Events in Charleston, South Carolina,² in the summer of 2015, followed by student protests at the University of Missouri³ in the fall of 2015, set the stage for the context of this case.⁴ First, the murder of nine Black parishioners in the historic Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church⁵ by Confederate-flag-bearing White supremacist,

Dylann Roof, ignited debates over whether Confederate flags and other icons are appropriate displays on/in American public buildings such as courthouses, schools, and universities (Brown, 2015a). Second, a group of Black students at the University of Missouri spoke out publicly against racism in their institution, followed by members of the football team going on strike. Similar student-led movements continue across the country, including Virginia Commonwealth University—Virginia’s most diverse university—located in the former capital of the Confederacy.⁶ In addition, some K-12 school districts are experiencing political turmoil as they struggle to grasp and respond to community concerns over their schools’ use of U.S. Civil War heroes and symbols for sports teams and school names (Rotherham, 2015). Almost 200 elementary and secondary schools throughout the United States are named after Confederate leaders, and many of those schools are in Virginia (Brown, 2015a).

Different cultural and racial groups often understand the causes of the Civil War differently and likewise perceive Confederate symbols contrarily. For many African Americans, these symbols are painfully associated with enslavement and White supremacy. Some who display such symbols may be aware of this but often seem unresponsive. Adding to this reticence, students are taught in many Southern states that slavery was merely a “side issue” and that the U.S. Civil War was essentially concerned with “states’ rights” and “Southern culture,” even if careful examination of historical artifacts may demonstrate otherwise (Coates, 2015). This dynamic is often exacerbated by what is taught, or what is not taught, in U.S. history classes. James W. Loewen, sociologist and author of the book *Lies My Teacher Told Me*, exposed numerous errors and omissions in textbooks regarding the role of slavery as a major cause of the Civil War, indicating that books adopted by schools are written to conform to cultural expectations of individual states, rather than based on historical evidence (Brown, 2015b).

Diversification and Disproportionality in U.S. Schools

Meanwhile, America’s population is racially and ethnically diversifying. Demographers predict that by 2043, those who identify as White will be a numerical minority in the United States (Badger, 2013). This increase in diversity implicates the roles educators play in understanding explicit and implicit racism and the hard work that must be done to ensure equal educational opportunities for all students, such as equity in disciplinary actions and access to advanced curricula (Jean-Marie & Mansfield, 2013; Marshall & Olivia, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004).

Because a disproportionate number of Black students live in poverty, it may seem that the effects of living conditions are the cause for disproportionalities in public schools. While concentrated poverty and associated inequality does increase students’ chances of exposure to trauma and subsequent anxiety, stress, irritability, and hypervigilance (Gregory, Skibba, & Noguera, 2010), poverty cannot be used as the only explanatory factor. For example, researchers (Curran, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Eitle & Eitle, 2004; Gregory et al., 2010; Lewis & Diamond, 2015; Martinez, McMahon, & Treger, 2016) find there are still clear racial disparities in discipline even after accounting for poverty. Indeed, when compared with White students, Black students are more

likely to be monitored, scrutinized, suspected, and sanctioned for similar infractions by school safety staff, teachers, and administrators (Curran, 2016; Dumas, 2016; Edwards, 2016; Gregory et al., 2010; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). While White students are often referred for “objectively observable” behaviors such as smoking and vandalism, Black students are more likely to be referred for behaviors that are more “subjective in nature,” such as loitering, excessive noise, and disrespect (Gregory et al., 2010, p. 62; Lewis & Diamond, 2015). In addition, Okonofua and Eberhardt (2015) find that teachers were more likely to label Black students “troublemakers,” felt significantly more troubled by a second infraction, and thought the Black students’ misbehavior should be given more severe consequences than they did the White students’ misbehavior. This is also true in Virginia, where the majority of out-of-school suspensions involving Black students are the result of minor infractions that do not involve violence (Langberg & Ciolfi, 2016).

While recent attention focuses on the disproportional discipline and punishment of Black male students, it is important to note that Black female students suffer from similar disciplinary prejudice: They are disproportionately punished for dress code violations and perceived disrespect and disobedience (Anderson, 2016; Watson, 2016; Wun, 2016). In an interview in *the Atlantic*, Monique W. Morris, cofounder of the National Black Women’s Justice Institute and author of *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools*, cited some troubling statistics: Of all female K-12 students, Black female students make up 42% of those subject to corporal punishment, 42% of those who are expelled, 45% of those with at least one out-of-school suspension, 31% of those referred to law enforcement, and 34% of girls arrested on school grounds. Yet, Black girls comprise only 16% of female students enrolled in U.S. schools (Anderson, 2016).

The composition of the U.S. teacher force and parent attitudes may contribute to these disparities. For example, public school teachers in the United States are 85% White and 75% female (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2007-2008). This can cause cultural mismatch between White teachers and students of color, particularly between White female teachers and Black male students. For example, overall, White teachers express negative expectations for Black students (Gregory et al., 2010; Okonofua & Eberhardt, 2015; Startz, 2016; Wright, 2015). Relatedly, Grissom and Redding (2016) find that, even after controlling for factors such as test scores, Black and Latino students were recommended for gifted programs at significantly lower rates when their teachers identified as White. This was also evident when controlling for student background and school/classroom variables (Grissom & Redding, 2016).

In addition, schools that Black, Hispanic, and Native American students attend are less likely to offer Advanced Placement (AP) coursework than are those that their White and Asian peers attend, and although they may attend schools that provide AP courses, students in protected classes are less likely to take them (Quinton, 2014). Data released by the U.S. Department of Education (USDOE) show that while Black and Latino students comprise 37% of high school students, they make up only 27% of students taking AP classes (Quinton, 2014).

In many cases, this within-school segregation is just as harmful to students as regional racial and economic segregation. For example, the underrepresentation of Black students in gifted programs perpetuates the “privilege-giftedness connection” (Mansfield ,

2015, p. 9) and leads to “reinforcing a social hierarchy in schools” (p. 11). Relatedly, the overrepresentation of Black students in discipline referrals generally, and school suspensions in particular (Losen, Hodson, Keith, Morrison, & Belway, 2015), is correlated with school pushout and contact with the criminal justice system, now commonly known as the school-to-prison pipeline (Dancy, 2014). Dancy refers to this phenomenon as “the disturbing national trend in which children are funneled out of public schools and into juvenile and criminal justice systems” (p. 477). The majority of students suspended negatively correlates with those who graduate high school: Black males. In fact, 38 out of 50 states report their lowest graduation rates among Black males (Dancy, 2014). Thus, Black males are especially vulnerable to being propelled into the school-to-prison pipeline (Dancy, 2014). Not surprisingly, this systematic removal of students from school is linked to the achievement gap (Morris & Perry, 2014, 2015). In response, the U.S. Departments of Justice and Education (USDOJ & USDOE, 2014) issued joint guidance concerning racial disparities in school discipline, mandating that school administrators compare their discipline data with school demographics and make efforts to close discipline gaps where unjustifiable disparities are found.

It is especially urgent to address this problem as the number of “at-risk” students grows in each state. This includes Virginia. In 2011-2012, more than 42,000 Black students were suspended from Virginia K-12 public schools (E. J. Smith & Harper, 2015). Furthermore, Black students were 24% of students in school districts across the state but comprised 51% of suspensions and 41% of expulsions (E. J. Smith & Harper, 2015).

Implications for School Leadership

Given the diversification of America’s schools, the continued manifestations of racism in society, and potential cultural mismatch between students and educators, implementing culturally responsive education and an ethic of care and justice is imperative (Gerstl-Pepin, Killeen, & Hasazi, 2006; Johnson, 2014). Gerstl-Pepin et al. and Johnson both suggest a pressing need to move past discussions of social justice to deeper thought as to how teachers teach and interact with students.

Johnson (2014) describes culturally responsive teaching as building knowledge about cultural diversity in curriculum, demonstrating respect and care toward a variety of cultures, and building learning communities. Similarly, Gerstl-Pepin et al. (2006) urge educational leaders to alter school curricula to include standards that address issues of diversity, create a shared definition for social justice, and focus on practitioner reflection. In addition, leadership preparation programs “need to cultivate leaders who ‘care’ about and are able to foster equitable learning communities by addressing inequities by race, class, geography, and gender” (Gerstl-Pepin et al., 2006, p. 251). This would comprise a commitment to respecting viewpoints, opinions, diversity, and languages; listening to and acknowledging differences; questioning personal unexamined assumptions; increasing trust and community while decreasing competition; expanding personal capacity to understand; and supporting the ideas of others. Johnson sees culturally responsive leadership as utilizing leadership philosophies, practices,

and policies to make more inclusive learning environments that foster high expectations, history, values, consciousness, and cultural knowledge.

But, there are challenges associated with interrogating racism in educational leadership preparation programs (Rusch & Horsford, 2009). Diem and Carpenter (2013) also acknowledge the culture of silence around race in university classrooms and consequent difficulty with constructive dialog around racism. As a result, many school leaders feel unprepared to discuss racial and cultural differences and perspectives, which limits their ability to lead in diverse contexts. Thus, lack of preparation may contribute to the tendency to circumvent conflict and controversy by avoiding conversations about race. In addition, unless preparation programs confront racism head on, they are likely to graduate school leaders who revert to “deficit thinking” when working in communities of color (Rusch & Horsford, p. 303). Thus, educational leadership programs do students (both university graduates and K-12 pupils) disservice by sending school leaders to work in diverse settings if they have not provided opportunities to have difficult discussions about race.

Case Narrative

Located in a hybrid suburban-rural district in Central Virginia, Robert E. Lee High School (Lee) has 1,557 students. The student body is 66% White, 13% African American, 11% Latino, 7% Asian, and 3% Mixed or Other (See Table 1).⁷ Twenty-five percent of Lee’s students participate in the free and reduced lunch program, but a greater number is likely eligible. At Lee, Black students represent 13% of the student body but account for 57% of disciplinary referrals, which include suspensions, expulsions, and referrals to police. Furthermore, Black students make up only 7% and 4% of the students in gifted programs and AP courses, respectively.

In his fifth year as principal of Robert E. Lee High School, “Home of the Rebels,” Dr. Robert “Brick” Buchanan, a White man, has hit his stride. Except for 3 years in a neighboring district, he has worked in Halcolm County Public Schools for the past 25 years. Dr. Buchanan has held positions as teacher, football coach, athletic director, assistant principal, and most recently as principal of one of the school district’s six comprehensive high schools. He grew up in the area, played football, and was known during his high school days as “Brick.” Brick is very personable and popular among parents, especially those who have lived in the area for a long time. He is from a blue-collar background, the first in his family to go to college, and connects well with students from similar backgrounds. Even as he has demonstrated astute political sensibilities, Dr. Buchanan does not always relate well to the more affluent families or have as much patience with their demands.

During his time at Lee, Dr. Buchanan has made both popular and unpopular changes to counteract the perception among some students and parents that athletics, especially football, receive unfair advantages. One popular change was adding more time during the school day to accommodate other student activities and clubs. In addition, Dr. Buchanan changed the Friday football concession system so that all student groups, not just the

Table 1. Student Population Indicated by Demographics.

Demographics	Students (N = 1,557)
White	
Count	1,028
%	66.0
African American	
Count	202
%	13.0
Asian	
Count	109
%	7.0
Latino	
Count	171
%	11.0
Mixed/Other	
Count	47
%	3.0

athletic department, would take turns operating and profiting from the sales. This decision was not so popular.

Although Dr. Buchanan has a good rapport with many of the Black students’ families, he is not close to the greater Black community. However, he did grow up playing with some of the Black male players from his high school football days, and some of those individuals have gone on to leadership and coaching roles in the greater community. Dr. Buchanan completed his EdD at a state university in Virginia and continues to participate in conferences and professional development where he is exposed to teachings about equity and social justice.

Recently, many students in the Black community have become increasingly vocal about the name and mascot of the school. Related conversations center around what they perceive as disparate treatment, including the fact that very few Black students are selected to serve on school committees such as the *Principal’s Student Advisory Group* or as representatives to the cross-school district group, *Aspiring Young Leaders*. They also point out problems of disproportionality in terms of discipline infractions and participation in advanced programming and view the name and mascot of the school as indicators of lingering racism that perpetuates unequal treatment.

Similar to the rest of the country, the teacher workforce is disproportionately White and female (Dee, 2004; Frankenberg, 2009; Partee, 2014). Often, White teachers have not had much experience with racial diversity and are not likely to have participated in cultural competency training (Frankenberg, 2009). Furthermore, students of color have been shown to perform better in schools that hire more faculty of color (Dee, 2004; Egalite, Kisida, & Winter, 2015; Partee, 2014). Table 2 provides a breakdown of the data by gender and race for faculty and staff members at Lee.

Table 2. Staff Members Indicated by Gender and Race.

	Staff members							
Gender/race	T	A	OS	IA	Cus	Caf	O	Total
Black female								
Count	2	0	1	2	3	6	0	14
%	14.3	0.0	7.1	14.3	21.4	42.0	0.0	100.0
White female								
Count	34	1	5	17	0	2	9	68
%	50	1.5	7.4	25.0	0.0	2.9	13.2	100.0
Black male								
Count	1	1	0	0	3	0	0	5
%	20.0	20.0	0.0	0.0	60.0	0.0	0.0	100.0
White male								
Count	25	1	0	1	0	0	6	33
%	75.8	3.0	0.0	3.0	0.0	0.0	18.2	100.0

Note. Gender was coded as female and male. Race was coded as Black or White. The staff members working within the school are coded T: teachers, A: administration, OS: office staff, IA: instructional aides, Cus: custodial staff, Caf: cafeteria workers, and O: other staff members, which include guidance counselors, nurses, and special services.

The Incidents

During the late summer of 2015, forums and discussions emerged at two local Black churches about the murder of Black parishioners in South Carolina, which led to conversations about the name and mascot of Lee, the underrepresentation of Black students in advanced courses and student leadership positions, and the overrepresentation of Black students accused of disciplinary infractions. By the beginning of the 2015-2016 school year, a loosely organized group of Black students called African American Students of Halcolm County Unite (AASHCU) was formed and was meeting every other week at the church. A week prior to school starting, a letter to the editor appeared in a local weekly newspaper addressed to Halcolm County Public School officials:

Public institutions such as schools are often named after heroes who are historic figures. While Robert E. Lee is a historic figure, he is not a hero. He fought to preserve the enslavement of African Americans. How do you think it makes us feel when African American students—our children—are forced to wear sports uniforms with the word “Rebels” across their chests? We are reminded of the inhumanity of slavery every time we see that name on the building or hear or read the name of the mascots announced at sports games and in our newspapers. Extracurricular activities such as sports are important to colleges. Our children are forced to choose between representing the enslavers of their ancestors or risk their competitive edge on their college applications if they don’t. Where are the schools and institutions that are named after any people of color? That are symbols of freedom?

While school board members read the letter and held private discussions about it, neither they nor Dr. Buchanan responded. Dr. Buchanan did reach out to one of the local Black pastors he knew to let him know that he and his administration, as well as Halcolm County school leaders, were in discussions about how to proceed; though he knew that as an employee of Halcolm County Public Schools, he could not come out publicly either against or in favor of the name of school. He puzzled over whether he should invite AASHCU to meet at the school or whether he should leave well enough alone. He was afraid that they might see him as trying to control the group; and also, he was afraid their presence in the school as an officially school-sanctioned group would spur the formation of pro-Confederate groups. On the contrary, he thought extending them an invitation might be a welcomed gesture. He decided to refrain from interacting with the group unless they reached out to him first.

In mid-October, student representatives from AASHCU made an appointment with Dr. Buchanan and presented him with the list of demands they plan to share with the School Board at their next meeting. The list included changing the name of the school and mascot, removing all Confederate symbols, ensuring equal representation in advanced programming and student governance, and creating a more just and equitable discipline referral process. The students also sent a letter detailing their concerns and demands to the editor of the local newspaper.

The School Board meeting included a packed room of approximately 350 students, teachers, parents, and community members. Many had come to hear and support students from AASHCU but also because it was early in the school year and the district had much to discuss this time of year. This night, in particular, had an influx of members from the Black community as compared with previous School Board meetings. Reporters from the local newspaper and television news station were also there to cover the meeting. As customary, Dr. Buchanan was present. However, this night he felt especially tense, as if walking on eggshells, but nonetheless, he maintained focus on the discussions at hand. The five students from AASHCU approached the podium when it was their turn to address the board. They were dressed in business casual attire and were well mannered when introducing themselves to a School Board of seven members, six of whom were White and one of whom was Black. Within their allotted 5 min, the student representatives were able to communicate their list of demands. In addition, they expressed concerns regarding the lack of action or response from Dr. Buchanan, which left them feeling ignored and discouraged. At that point, all the Black students, parents, and community members present at the School Board meeting gave a standing ovation to the AASHCU student representatives. There were also some White students, parents, teachers, and community members who also stood and applauded to support AASHCU's causes.

As word spread about the Black students' demands, community members' responses were chronicled in newspaper articles and television news stories. Some reactions were supportive, others were dismissive (including some from Black students and families), while some expressed support for preserving the Lee name and the rebel mascot. In one article, a Black student was quoted in the newspaper as saying,

As a Black student, I don't always feel welcome or that it's easy to try to learn in a place that honors a man like Robert E. Lee.

A White student wrote in support,

Our school is ready for a name that we can all feel good about. Robert E. Lee is not that person.

A White parent who was also sympathetic to the cause wrote,

The Confederate Army and its leader stood for the enslavement and terrorization of African Americans. This causes fear and pain among many members of our community. I do not want any of my children to bear the name of the Rebels or to honor what the Confederate Army fought for: a system of slavery and white supremacy. I know a lot of people who are very uncomfortable with continuing business as usual.

Other responses were not so supportive. A week later, a letter from the president of Lee High School, class of 1977, was published:

Robert E. Lee was a major historical figure and military hero before the Civil War. He chose to defend Virginia not because it was part of the Confederacy, but because it was his home state. The intent of the board when the school was originally named was not to condone slavery, but to honor an important Virginian. If you rename the school, will you have to rename everything named after Robert E. Lee? What about Thomas Jefferson or George Washington? Are you going to start erasing the names of these famous Virginians because they owned slaves? Where will it all end? The majority of members in this community want to leave the name alone.

In reaction to the Black students' demand that the school change its name and mascot, a group of White students circulated an opposing petition that the name should be preserved. "Robert E. Lee really represents us as the Southern school that we really are," senior Sarah Beth Proffitt said when she and a group of student leaders delivered the petition. She added,

My dad was a Rebel. My mom was a Rebel. I'm a rebel. Who would we even be if we weren't "the Rebels"? It's not really the fact that the school is named after a Confederate leader that people hold onto. It's the history of the school itself.

Others commented that slavery was just a side issue in the Civil War, the Civil War was about states' rights, and the flag and the mascot just represented school pride. "Some of us have been in this community and school district for generations. We're not racists. We're just proud of our school and our heritage," one parent said. Some community members raised questions about the costs affiliated with the name change—logo, sports uniforms, and school marquee. For example, one said, "We are in a time of tight budgets. Can we really afford to get all new uniforms and school signs just to be 'political correct?'"

There was not as much reaction to concerns about overrepresentation in disciplinary matters and underrepresentation in advanced courses, although one parent did say, "If the students can't do the work they shouldn't be in the classes. They will bring our kids down with them." In addition, AP and International Baccalaureate (IB) teachers balked when the idea of opening advanced courses to any student who chooses to take them was mentioned. "Those kids need to be prepared to take an exam at the end of the course. If I have to water down my curriculum so students who aren't ready can keep up, nobody's going to pass." Most recently, some members of the football team, along with the men's and women's basketball teams, are threatening to "go on strike" or not play or practice until the demands outlined by AASHCU are satisfactorily addressed.

Taken together, these events created turbulence in the community. The phones at the high school were ringing off the hook. One parent, a member of the Halcolm County Board of Supervisors, was interviewed by a local television station stating, "Now, what does long-dead General Lee have to do with playing football? Why does everything have to be about race these days?" One African American parent stated, "I don't like it. I teach my children to obey and respect authority. But if this is what it will take to change that name, I don't see what other choice they have." In addition, a member of the football boosters club began drawing up a potential roster of the players who were not committed to striking along with players from the freshman team. Some students and parents, however, were in support of the strike.

The time had come for Dr. Buchanan to take action.

Additional Considerations

Changing negative and destructive patterns in schools, and educating everyone's child so they achieve at high levels, has been shown to be a formidable undertaking (R. G. Smith et al., 2011). This task requires those in schools to rethink and restructure what expectations they hold for all students, how their schools are organized to support teaching and learning, what curricula will be implemented, what practices include or exclude students, and how instruction will be delivered and assessed, among other aspects of schooling (Mansfield, 2015, 2016; R. G. Smith et al., 2011). To accomplish this requires strong, focused, insightful, and skilled leadership (McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). While scholars may write about what can or should be done, educational leaders are those *who must deliver some version of social justice and equity* (Marshall & Olivia, 2009). To address racially based, disparate treatment in a socially just manner, will Dr. Buchanan employ what has been described as passion, persistence, and practice (Singleton & Linton, 2006)? That is, will he harness the necessary *passion* to drive and inform his actions? Will he embody *persistence* by devoting the required time and efforts to ensuring successful change? Will Dr. Buchanan facilitate change in *practice* by working with his staff to implement alternative curricular, student assignment, and disciplinary policies? If so, how?

Dr. Buchanan recognizes the multiple contexts within which his school community and his leadership exist, but he can no longer neglect the disparate treatment of Black

students nor can he overlook the tension that Confederate symbolism has caused between many in his community. He must attempt to unpack these experiences and consider how his decision making either reproduces or ameliorates marginalization and inequitable treatment of members of the nondominant group (Dantley & Tillman, 2009). He can no longer continue to fall back on comfortable traditions that ultimately short-change one group of students (Marshall & Parker, 2009). Furthermore, he must be politically nimble as the community moves from a “dominated” one (where a small group of community members exercise the most influence) to one that could quickly become “factional” (where at least two groups compete for influence; Spring, 2011, p. 74). In the end, the best-case scenario would be if the community transitions to a “pluralistic” (Spring, 2011, p. 75) one (where different groups compete for influence but no single group dominates).

Dr. Buchanan has several groups to contend with, including the student members of AASHCU, their supporters, and much of Halcolm County’s Black community. In addition, there are some students, parents, and community members who are resistant to change. As an educational leader, Dr. Buchanan is responsible to all students in the entire community. If he is going to initiate change, he has to do so considering the perspectives of multiple stakeholders so that people from all perspectives feel they are heard, as well as to strengthen the chances that these changes are supported—or, at least, not actively negated (Marshall & Olivia, 2009; McKenzie & Scheurich, 2004). Dr. Buchanan needs to operate in a “democratic environment because inherent in the fiber of democracy is the celebration of the multiple voices, identities, and perspectives of all those in the community” (Dantley & Tillman, 2009, p. 22). The football and basketball teams and their games are a positive and central force in the community. If there are enough players willing to boycott sports, the games would be canceled. The potentially unifying effect of the teams and their games would be lost. Dr. Buchanan knows things will only get worse the longer he delays addressing the situation. But how does he begin?

First, Dr. Buchanan might choose to follow Rusch and Horsford’s (2009) call to lead in a socially just and equitable manner by moving beyond privilege through self-contribution. That is, privilege and subsequent defensiveness need to be unlearned, and multiple narratives, including people of color’s voices, need to be heard. Their perspectives must be respected as those competent to speak about race and racism. In addition, Dr. Buchanan might employ Johnson’s (2014) framework to strengthen his culturally responsive leadership role: Create new definitions for diversity, advocate for inclusive instructional practices, shape relations between schools and communities, and be a catalyst for change by empowering students, parents, and communities who have been previously marginalized in schools. Although Dr. Buchanan knows this is the right thing to do, he is unsure of how to proceed.

Dr. Buchanan would do well to follow culturally responsive practices and ethics of care displayed by, for example, the female African American educational leaders studied by Johnson (2007) and Bass (2012). These educators made efforts to enhance parents and community member involvement and to improve their schools’ environments through culturally responsive practices (Johnson, 2014). In addition, they practiced an ethic of care as a productive force in school reform, a response to oppression,

a key to promoting a positive school climate, and as a way to invite the disenfranchised to speak and be heard (Bass, 2012). Furthermore, Dr. Buchanan will need to weigh the concept of ethics of justice (or consider whether there is a law or policy affiliated with the case) against the concept of ethic of care (or reflect on the consequences of the individual's actions: Who benefits? Who might be hurt? What are the long-term effects of the decision?) and comprehend his role as a model of ethical behavior for staff and students (Cook, 2012; McGee & Mansfield, 2014).

Teaching Notes

Discussion Questions

1. Should Dr. Buchanan have met with Black church and student leaders during the summer? How might that have diffused the situation? What tensions might it have caused?
2. What are the considerations and potential pros and cons of bringing AASHCU under the school's umbrella, as an officially sanctioned school group or club?
3. If you were Dr. Buchanan, would you have posted a response in the newspaper? Explain why or why not.
4. Even if Dr. Buchanan wanted to change the name and mascot of the school, it is not within his purview to do so. Ultimately, this matter is up to the School Board. How should Dr. Buchanan handle this? Should he support the preservation of the name and mascot of the high school he leads or urge changing the name of the school as well as the mascot? Or should he refrain from taking a position? Explain why or why not.
5. What are some concrete ways that Dr. Buchanan can use passion, persistence, and practice to implement socially just leadership (Authors, 2013)? Include specific examples.
6. What steps can Dr. Buchanan take to make a majority of the stakeholders feel that at least their side has received a fair hearing so they might support change? To practice democratic leadership and to acknowledge all perspectives (Dantley & Tillman, 2009)?
7. What should Dr. Buchanan's response be to parents who express that allowing certain students access to advanced classes will hurt their own children's chances (Authors, 2015)?
8. How can Dr. Buchanan and his staff implement new discipline policies that will ensure fairness and justice and not simply a crude reduction in referrals and suspensions? How can stakeholders be assured that changing discipline procedures will not result in disorder in the school (Authors, 2016)?
9. What kind of professional development will be necessary to implement a program of equitable discipline and access to rich curricula for all students (R. G. Smith et al., 2011)?
10. How should Dr. Buchanan and his administrators prepare themselves for push-back against the stance they ultimately decide to take (R. G. Smith et al., 2011)?

Activities

Do a version of “Think-Pair-Share.” Give students time to do some reflective writing in response to the following question: What are the underpinnings of institutional racism in this case? What are the ways in which institutional racism plays a role? How would you as a leader try to challenge and dismantle those? Then, have students work in pairs to share what they discovered via the writing exercise.

Conduct a brainstorming session. Depending on the number of students in the course, students work together in pairs or small groups to engage with one of the following *Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) Standards*:

STANDARD 1. MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

STANDARD 2. ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL NORMS

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 3. EQUITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 4. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 5. COMMUNITY OF CARE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

STANDARD 6. PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 7. PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 8. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 9. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

STANDARD 10. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Using chart paper, have students indicate how their assigned standard is applicable to this case study. Students may use the more detailed description of the standards included in the appendix. Have students give specific examples of how they might respond to the case with their particular standard in mind. Make sure students have access to additional chart paper and markers to accommodate their ideas. Each group should be able to indicate what educational leaders are supposed to know, believe, and do. What are the knowledge, dispositions, and performances needed for each standard in regard to this case?

After students work in small groups, have all students exchange freely between and among each of the groupings of chart papers. Encourage students to insert additional ideas as brainstorming continues.

As a large group, go through each standard one-by-one and thoroughly discuss ideas presented. As you listen to students' comments, challenge them to move "beyond the talk to include the walk" (Dantley & Tillman, 2009). This will likely require more than one class session.

Assign independent study/essay. In recent decades, practices such as suspension and expulsion have become increasingly widespread as school discipline approaches have "criminalized" student misbehavior in ways that reflect "tough on crime" strategies in the criminal justice system. Deployment of school resource officers, security cameras, random searches, and "zero-tolerance" policies exemplifies stricter tactics aimed at school behavior management and has resulted in increased school suspensions (Mansfield, 2016; Morris & Perry, 2016). Zero tolerance in schools has come to mean "an ethos or school climate characterized by the use of severe discipline and punitive measures generally" (Curran, 2016, p. 5). According to Curran, zero tolerance policies became more popular in the 1990s in response, at least in part, to the federal *Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994* (GFSA). GFSA mandated that to qualify for federal funding, states had to enact laws requiring that school district students be expelled if they brought firearms or other weapons to schools. Also, zero tolerance policies often apply to drug possession and assault. As of 2013, all states, except Massachusetts and Hawaii, mandate expulsion for bringing a weapon to school, and in fact, Virginia was one of the first states to enact a mandatory expulsion law.

- a. Discuss what you know about the effectiveness and fairness of zero-tolerance policies in K-12 schools. Given the research presented in this case study, what do you know about the racially disparate implications of zero-tolerance policies?

- b. Gather information about your state's development and use of zero-tolerance policies. In addition, revisit what your school district stands on this issue. Is there any conflict between the state and district policies? Are these policies sound? How do you or would you as an educational leader follow and/or enforce those policies while also integrating the ISLLC standards? Are there competing values/ethics? How do you reconcile the ethic of care with other important values (McGee & Mansfield, 2014)?

Long-Term Small Group Assignment

As discussed in class, Dr. Buchanan does not have the power to change the names or symbols of schools and teams. Rather, this is the duty of the School Board. In pairs or small groups, draft a proposal to the school board proceeding with the name changing process for Lee. In addition to outlining the proposal, include commentary explaining the process and necessary steps needed to change the name with the least amount of political conflict. Include three potentially appropriate names and mascots. The proposal should be no longer than five pages, excluding cover page, references, and/or appendices.

Appendix

Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015⁸

STANDARD 1. MISSION, VISION, AND CORE VALUES

Effective educational leaders develop, advocate, and enact a shared mission, vision, and core values of high-quality education and academic success and well-being of each student.

Effective leaders:

- a. Develop an educational mission for the school to promote the academic success and well-being of each student.
- b. In collaboration with members of the school and the community and using relevant data, develop and promote a vision for the school on the successful learning and development of each child and on instructional and organizational practices that promote such success.
- c. Articulate, advocate, and cultivate core values that define the school's culture and stress the imperative of child-centered education; high expectations and student support; equity, inclusiveness, and social justice; openness, caring, and trust; and continuous improvement.
- d. Strategically develop, implement, and evaluate actions to achieve the vision for the school.
- e. Review the school's mission and vision and adjust them to changing expectations and opportunities for the school, and changing needs and situations of students.

- f. Develop shared understanding of and commitment to mission, vision, and core values within the school and the community.
- g. Model and pursue the school's mission, vision, and core values in all aspects of leadership.

STANDARD 2. ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL NORMS

Effective educational leaders act ethically and according to professional norms to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Act ethically and professionally in personal conduct, relationships with others, decision making, stewardship of the school's resources, and all aspects of school leadership.
- b. Act according to and promote the professional norms of integrity, fairness, transparency, trust, collaboration, perseverance, learning, and continuous improvement.
- c. Place children at the center of education and accept responsibility for each student's academic success and well-being.
- d. Safeguard and promote the values of democracy, individual freedom and responsibility, equity, social justice, community, and diversity.
- e. Lead with interpersonal and communication skill, social-emotional insight, and understanding of all students' and staff members' backgrounds and cultures.
- f. Provide moral direction for the school and promote ethical and professional behavior among faculty and staff.

STANDARD 3. EQUITY AND CULTURAL RESPONSIVENESS

Effective educational leaders strive for equity of educational opportunity and culturally responsive practices to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Ensure that each student is treated fairly, respectfully, and with an understanding of each student's culture and context.
- b. Recognize, respect, and employ each student's strengths, diversity, and culture as assets for teaching and learning.
- c. Ensure that each student has equitable access to effective teachers, learning opportunities, academic and social support, and other resources necessary for success.
- d. Develop student policies and address student misconduct in a positive, fair, and unbiased manner.
- e. Confront and alter institutional biases of student marginalization, deficit-based schooling, and low expectations associated with race, class, culture and language, gender and sexual orientation, and disability or special status.

- f. Promote the preparation of students to live productively in and contribute to the diverse cultural contexts of a global society.
- g. Act with cultural competence and responsiveness in their interactions, decision making, and practice.
- h. Address matters of equity and cultural responsiveness in all aspects of leadership.

STANDARD 4. CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Implement coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment that promote the mission, vision, and core values of the school, embody high expectations for student learning, align with academic standards, and are culturally responsive.
- b. Align and focus systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment within and across grade levels to promote student academic success, love of learning, the identities and habits of learners, and healthy sense of self.
- c. Promote instructional practice that is consistent with knowledge of child learning and development, effective pedagogy, and the needs of each student.
- d. Ensure instructional practice that is intellectually challenging, authentic to student experiences, recognizes student strengths, and is differentiated and personalized.
- e. Promote the effective use of technology in the service of teaching and learning.
- f. Employ valid assessments that are consistent with knowledge of child learning and development and technical standards of measurement.
- g. Use assessment data appropriately and within technical limitations to monitor student progress and improve instruction.

STANDARD 5. COMMUNITY OF CARE AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

Effective educational leaders cultivate an inclusive, caring, and supportive school community that promotes the academic success and well-being of each student.

Effective leaders:

- a. Build and maintain a safe, caring, and healthy school environment that meets that the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student.
- b. Create and sustain a school environment in which each student is known, accepted and valued, trusted and respected, cared for, and encouraged to be an active and responsible member of the school community.
- c. Provide coherent systems of academic and social supports, services, extracurricular activities, and accommodations to meet the range of learning needs of each student.

- d. Promote adult–student, student–peer, and school–community relationships that value and support academic learning and positive social and emotional development.
- e. Cultivate and reinforce student engagement in school and positive student conduct.
- f. Infuse the school’s learning environment with the cultures and languages of the school’s community.

STANDARD 6. PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Effective educational leaders develop the professional capacity and practice of school personnel to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Recruit, hire, support, develop, and retain effective and caring teachers and other professional staff and form them into an educationally effective faculty.
- b. Plan for and manage staff turnover and succession, providing opportunities for effective induction and mentoring of new personnel.
- c. Develop teachers’ and staff members’ professional knowledge, skills, and practice through differentiated opportunities for learning and growth, guided by understanding of professional and adult learning and development.
- d. Foster continuous improvement of individual and collective instructional capacity to achieve outcomes envisioned for each student.
- e. Deliver actionable feedback about instruction and other professional practice through valid, research-anchored systems of supervision and evaluation to support the development of teachers’ and staff members’ knowledge, skills, and practice.
- f. Empower and motivate teachers and staff to the highest levels of professional practice and to continuous learning and improvement.
- g. Develop the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community.
- h. Promote the personal and professional health, well-being, and work–life balance of faculty and staff.
- i. Tend to their own learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement, maintaining a healthy work–life balance.

STANDARD 7. PROFESSIONAL COMMUNITY FOR TEACHERS AND STAFF

Effective educational leaders foster a professional community of teachers and other professional staff to promote each student’s academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Develop workplace conditions for teachers and other professional staff that promote effective professional development, practice, and student learning.

- b. Empower and entrust teachers and staff with collective responsibility for meeting the academic, social, emotional, and physical needs of each student, pursuant to the mission, vision, and core values of the school.
- c. Establish and sustain a professional culture of engagement and commitment to shared vision, goals, and objectives pertaining to the education of the whole child; high expectations for professional work; ethical and equitable practice; trust and open communication; and collaboration, collective efficacy, and continuous individual and organizational learning and improvement.
- d. Promote mutual accountability among teachers and other professional staff for each student's success and the effectiveness of the school as a whole.
- e. Develop and support open, productive, caring, and trusting working relationships among leaders, faculty, and staff to promote professional capacity and the improvement of practice.
- f. Design and implement job-embedded and other opportunities for professional learning collaboratively with faculty and staff.
- g. Provide opportunities for collaborative examination of practice, collegial feedback, and collective learning.
- h. Encourage faculty-initiated improvement of programs and practices.

STANDARD 8. MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT OF FAMILIES AND COMMUNITY

Effective educational leaders engage families and the community in meaningful, reciprocal, and mutually beneficial ways to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Are approachable, accessible, and welcoming to families and members of the community.
- b. Create and sustain positive, collaborative, and productive relationships with families and the community for the benefit of students.
- c. Engage in regular and open two-way communication with families and the community about the school, students, needs, problems, and accomplishments.
- d. Maintain a presence in the community to understand its strengths and needs, develop productive relationships, and engage its resources for the school.
- e. Create means for the school community to partner with families to support student learning in and out of school.
- f. Understand, value, and employ the community's cultural, social, intellectual, and political resources to promote student learning and school improvement.
- g. Develop and provide the school as a resource for families and the community.
- h. Advocate for the school and district, and for the importance of education and student needs and priorities to families and the community.
- i. Advocate publicly for the needs and priorities of students, families, and the community.

- j. Build and sustain productive partnerships with public and private sectors to promote school improvement and student learning.

STANDARD 9. OPERATIONS AND MANAGEMENT

Effective educational leaders manage school operations and resources to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Institute, manage, and monitor operations and administrative systems that promote the mission and vision of the school.
- b. Strategically manage staff resources, assigning and scheduling teachers and staff to roles and responsibilities that optimize their professional capacity to address each student's learning needs.
- c. Seek, acquire, and manage fiscal, physical, and other resources to support curriculum, instruction, and assessment; student learning community; professional capacity and community; and family and community engagement.
- d. Are responsible, ethical, and accountable stewards of the school's monetary and nonmonetary resources, engaging in effective budgeting and accounting practices.
- e. Protect teachers' and other staff members' work and learning from disruption.
- f. Employ technology to improve the quality and efficiency of operations and management.
- g. Develop and maintain data and communication systems to deliver actionable information for classroom and school improvement.
- h. Know, comply with, and help the school community understand local, state, and federal laws, rights, policies, and regulations so as to promote student success.
- i. Develop and manage relationships with feeder and connecting schools for enrollment management and curricular and instructional articulation.
- j. Develop and manage productive relationships with the central office and school board.
- k. Develop and administer systems for fair and equitable management of conflict among students, faculty and staff, leaders, families, and community.
- l. Manage governance processes and internal and external politics toward achieving the school's mission and vision.

STANDARD 10. SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT

Effective educational leaders act as agents of continuous improvement to promote each student's academic success and well-being.

Effective leaders:

- a. Seek to make school more effective for each student, teachers and staff, families, and the community.

- b. Use methods of continuous improvement to achieve the vision, fulfill the mission, and promote the core values of the school.
- c. Prepare the school and the community for improvement; promoting readiness, an imperative for improvement; instilling mutual commitment and accountability; and developing the knowledge, skills, and motivation to succeed in improvement.
- d. Engage others in an ongoing process of evidence-based inquiry, learning, strategic goal setting, planning, implementation, and evaluation for continuous school and classroom improvement.
- e. Employ situationally appropriate strategies for improvement, including transformational and incremental, adaptive approaches and attention to different phases of implementation.
- f. Assess and develop the capacity of staff to assess the value and applicability of emerging educational trends and the findings of research for the school and its improvement.
- g. Develop technically appropriate systems of data collection, management, analysis, and use, connecting as needed to the district office and external partners for support in planning, implementation, monitoring, feedback, and evaluation.
- h. Adopt a systems perspective and promote coherence among improvement efforts and all aspects of school organization, programs, and services.
- i. Manage uncertainty, risk, competing initiatives, and politics of change with courage and perseverance, providing support and encouragement, and openly communicating the need for, process for, and outcomes of improvement efforts.
- j. Develop and promote leadership among teachers and staff for inquiry, experimentation and innovation, and initiating and implementing improvement.

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Notes

- 1. Taken from the second paragraph of The Declaration of Independence: The Want, Will, and Hopes of the People (1776) Available online at: <http://www.ushistory.org/declaration/document/>
- 2. On June 17, 2015, a White male opened fire at a church in Charleston, South Carolina, killing nine African Americans. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/morning-mix/wp/2015/06/17/white-gunman-sought-in-shooting-at-historic-charleston-african-ame-church/>
- 3. Tim Wolfe resigned as the president of the University of Missouri on November 9, 2015. This was a result from pressure from students regarding recent racial incidents. <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2015/11/university-of-missouri-president-resigns-racism-football-hunger-strike>

4. While this specific case is fictional, much of the narrative is a composite, drawing inspiration from several real-life accounts.
5. <http://www.ibtimes.com/charleston-church-shooting-south-carolina-racism-will-not-change-after-killings-black-1979391>
6. http://www.richmond.com/news/local/city-of-richmond/article_4a05d70e-99fe-539f-9097-8415205caafd.html
7. We recognize that racial and ethnic identity categories vary over time and space. Here, we use the terms as currently recognized by Virginia government agencies.
8. The full report of *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders* is available at <http://www.ccsso.org/Documents/2015/ProfessionalStandardsforEducationalLeaders2015forNPBEAFINAL.pdf>.

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