

# Study finds that black students benefit from black teachers

A recent study co-authored by an economist from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore concludes that black students who have at least one black teacher in elementary school are more likely to graduate from high school and consider college.

Published by the Institute of Labor Economics, the study found that having at least one black teacher in third through fifth grades reduced a black student's probability of dropping out by 29 percent. For black boys, the reduction – 39 percent – was even more marked.

Those numbers only reinforce a belief held by some for years.

Consider Dr. La Uanah King-Cassell, the principal of Ss. James and John Catholic School for more than 30 years, and a subscriber to the findings of the study. While she thinks that good teaching, rather than a teacher's race, is paramount, she does not dismiss the effect a positive black role model can have.

"I do think that African-American students need teachers and instructors with a deep understanding and respect of their culture," she said. "In some cases, particularly with male teachers, they can influence and motivate them, particularly with boys. In that sense, I want to say that I could see how an African-American teacher can make a difference."

According to Nicholas Papageorge, the Johns Hopkins economist who co-authored the study, elementary school students spending one year with a teacher of the same race can have a lasting effect for years to come.

"Many of these kids can't imagine being an educated person and perhaps that's because they've never seen one who looks like them," Papageorge said in an April news release from Hopkins. "Then, they get to spend a whole year with one. This

one black teacher can change a student's entire future outlook."

Charmaine Trice, a third grade teacher at Ss. James and John, one of four elementary schools in Baltimore City receiving Partners in Excellence support, echoes that sentiment.

"I think when children come in the classroom and see someone who looks like them doing positive things, they feel like, 'Hey, I can do this too,'" she said.

Trice said she believes that one cause for the findings of the study could be that African-American teachers hold their students to higher expectations, and admitted to pushing her students much harder. King-Cassell approves of that tactic.

"In society, not all things are equal - (African-Americans) have to do a bit more, and I think an African-American teacher will stress that," King-Cassell said. "Let's face it, when African-American kids get out in the real world, it's not an even playing field. Not only do you have to have what's required, you have to have a step above that."

Both Trice and King-Cassell said that they see the effect they have when students return to Ss. James and John to speak of their experiences there.

"When they come back," Trice said, "it's always on a day when I'm wondering if I'm doing the right thing. Seeing them just lifts me up."