

Amy Buchanan: A Representative of Change

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According to Bell (2013), “the goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs” (p. 21). It takes a special person to stand and fight for what’s right on a daily basis. McCray and Beachum (2014) stated that “Building bridges with the community is a prerequisite for school success” (p.74). Similarly, Amy Buchanan the former principal of the Alden Terrace Elementary School and the current principal of the Dutch Broadway Elementary School, has done this throughout her tenure as a teacher, assistant principal, and principal.

Buchanan demonstrates her appreciation for and sensitivity to the diversity in the school community by treating each individual equally and celebrating their uniqueness, while reinforcing similarities. She represents what Shields (2004) described as transformative leaders, who “develop positive relationships with students such that children may bring their own lived experiences into the school and classroom, and facilitate moral dialogue” (p. 113). She acknowledges that it is important for teachers to make children feel welcomed in school and the classroom. When students are able to bring their experiences into the classroom, it creates a sense of belonging and increases their motivation. “When the motivation to learn comes from the inside, students’ passion and engagement are almost limitless” (Ostroff, 2016, p. 47). Amy leads her school ensuring that learning is engaging for students and content is relevant to students’ everyday lives and experiences.

Amy promotes the success of all students by ensuring that they have access to a grade appropriate curriculum. She maintains high expectations for each and every student. Amy ensures that students have the knowledge, skills, and values needed to become successful adults. She believes modeling behaviors for success is always key. More important, the focus must

begin early. Many high school programs and clubs are wonderful, but the formative elementary years need a similar focus. Amy defines the culture of her school as inclusive and child centered. It is her school's goal to ensure that each child is given an equal opportunity to receive quality education. The level of focus on each child promises for a successful send off to the next level of schooling. She leads by the principle that "optimistic education opens windows of understanding and doors of opportunity for all children" (Shields, 2004, p. 125) and ensures that all students deserve a fair chance to learn. It is amazing how being optimistic can inspire children from different backgrounds to succeed. She also understands that "in order to succeed, change needs to be strengthened, monitored, and integrated into the ritual of daily life" (Harro, 2013, p. 624).

Amy Buchanan is one of the most respected people within the Elmont School District. She is passionate about ensuring that no student fall through the cracks in school or the community and she has taken part in making this so. She accomplishes this by communicating continuously with her students. Amy stated, "I share my story and the stories of my ancestors with my children. People are able to relate to you when you share your trials and demonstrate that with love, commitment and hard work...anything is possible. I often tell my students that knowledge is a powerful thing" (Personal communication, November 28, 2016). She continues on to explain that often times a person who is falling through the cracks may not believe they he or she can succeed. They need to develop a sense of optimism and a feeling of self-efficacy. Role models are key to this development. It is rewarding to see that someone who is not doing well can completely turn around with the right people in the forefront of their lives.

Buchanan is not just an inspiration for African American women; she is an inspiration for all people. As Young, Dolph, and Russo (2015) acknowledged, "it has come as no surprise that

for many years' African American educators established a tradition of investing in the success of Black students and communities in a variety of ways, including positively affecting student achievement as well as school climate and culture" (p. 340). There were many times when Buchanan would go above and beyond for a student, family, teacher, colleague, or friend. She has truly made a difference in many lives, young and old. She is a strong advocate, who gives her best every day.

References

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