

Dear Editor,

As an Afro-American Pittsfield Public School system alumnus I am encouraged to learn that a Black woman is being considered to lead Pittsfield's Public Schools.

Rare was I not the lone brown face in class and one of many among peers at lunch and on the practice fields. Throughout my primary and secondary education this dynamic of often being alone, and nearly always in Honors and AP courses, was familiar, seemed normal, and became expected.

What never became unexpected was the feeling of surpassing low expectations. That peculiar sensation of indignation and accomplishment and fury and silence when my academic ability came as a surprise.

What never became abnormal was having to seek out authors of color, who were exceedingly rare in the syllabus. "The Souls of Black Folk", The Autobiography of Malcolm X, "Black Justice In A White World", "Native Son", were my small acts of rebellion against exclusive summer reading lists, and Harriet Beecher Stowe.

What never became unfamiliar was the complete absence of in-school role models. Teachers, deans, mentors, counselors who *lived*, not just empathized with what it means on the daily to be Black, Native American, Latinx, or multi-racial.

My experience was not unique and in the nearly 10 years since it appears that not much has changed in our school system. Where nearly 4 in 10 students are of color, yet only 1 in 10 "full time equivalent" positions are held by people of color. Where students of color face disciplinary action at rates twice that of their less melanin-endowed peers, and, disturbingly, are referred to the police 3 to 5 times more often. Where students of color--with the exception of Asian American students--lag behind their peers in completing Advanced Placement courses¹. Again, familiar, normal, and expected.

As a community and as individuals, we need to stop waiting for traumatic events to shake us into awareness of these disparities. They are constantly at work, reinforcing gaps that widen as students move through school and into the workforce. Choosing a Black woman to lead our public school system can be a first step towards mending these disparities. Towards celebrating, teaching, and employing all cultures, histories and standards for success. Towards a more rewarding public education. Towards a more just society.

Upon reflection,
Kamaar Taliaferro,
Of 78 Howard Street,
Pittsfield, Ma.

¹ <https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student.aspx?orgcode=02360000&orgtypecode=5&>