

Mentoring for Diversity and Inclusion

By Brooke Brown

Mentors are important to support your growth in many areas. If we are lucky, people come into our lives that help us through important seasons, imparting their wisdom and authentically sharing pieces of themselves. I have been lucky throughout my life to have people like that. They are such a big part of how I came to be who I am today. These are people who were willing to take the extra time to make themselves available, to help cultivate the gifts and potential in me, and to see what I had yet to believe about myself. As educators, there are so many aspects of the profession to learn; and our new teachers deserve to have mentors to support them, and to believe in them. However, new teachers also have a lot they bring with them, and it is important for us to remember that mentoring requires humility, and through partnership, learning can go both ways.

The NAKIA Mentor Program is a place where new and newish teachers of color can find ongoing support and development in an environment that considers the whole person. Through NAKIA mentorship, staff of color are provided opportunities to connect and collaborate to find and develop best practices to meet the needs of all students in our classrooms, while keeping at the forefront the lenses of equity and culturally responsive practices that embody the spirit of whole heartedness that NAKIA represents. One participant, Lovi Harvey, shared that being part of the NAKIA Mentor program has allowed her to meet and connect with amazing people, collaborate, and birth great moments of reflectiveness and ideas to move mentoring into a deeper level of support.

I have had the unique pleasure of participating in the NAKIA program as a participant in the first round, facilitator in round two and three, and then was able to build a partnership with our district and local union to host our own NAKIA Mentor training last year. This was modeled after the partnership between WEA and OSPI through the outstanding leadership of their staff leads. This year we have rolled out a program in our district where our NAKIA mentors are able to support new staff of color in each building. Kevin Shintaku, an elementary music educator shared, "What I have seen from NAKIA mentoring is uplifting in that most new staff are independent at their jobs but appreciate their jobs more when they know that they have a mentor of color looking out for them in the workplace. When staff of color know that someone else in the building can be a model, reference, or friend, they can feel a sense of belonging that can often be missing from the workplace that leads to higher rates of attrition. As a mentor I truly feel like I belong in my building, and I want bring diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging to the forefront of my work as a leader in my school community."

Staff of color already hold many leadership roles within the school system often without a formalized title. The NAKIA program helps to support the leadership qualities these phenomenal



educators already have and provide a space where they can build community and connect with one another. Amy Sexton shared that she joined NAKIA to build relationships with other staff of color and to glean more insight on how to use her passing privilege within a system that wasn't necessarily built for people of color, students or staff. She shared that she was born in Seoul, South Korea. Her mother is Korean and her father is Caucasian, and English is her second language; but you'd never guess that by looking at her. She openly struggles with her own multi-culturalism and trying to fit in. Being part of the NAKIA community has been a way to support that identity development through community and transparency.

Having a NAKIA mentor is something that is new to our district and, according to Kim, is super cool in that it is flexible enough to work to meet your needs. She shared that the education system has a tendency to focus on hiring staff of color but often misses the retention of staff of color. One of the ways we're working to start combatting that is by providing support for staff of color by staff of color. We can all acknowledge that the work we do is dope, and also exhausting a lot of the time. As a NAKIA mentor, she's here to offer support and check-ins, basically all the good stuff that comes with mentoring as well as to just connect as humans if that is something you're interested in. She believes her role is to offer support and connection. Ultimately, mentoring for diversity and inclusion includes validating the lived experience of our staff of color and appreciating the value they bring to our educational system.