



Reasonable Voice

Mentors Provide Best Example of Leadership

His name is William. But the story has as much to do with the teacher as the student.

By the time William was in 8th grade, he had lived in several places in the city. He would live with his mom or his dad, depending on who was in jail at the time. At this time in his life, he was living with his mom, as his dad was serving a sentence in prison.

One day in early October of that year, William came home from school, but his mom wasn't there. Child Protective Services was waiting for him, and told him that his mom had been found unconscious in a local park, passed out from a drug overdose. And so William would move again, along with his two younger brothers; this time to an aunt's apartment several blocks away. The neighborhood was in a high crime, inner-city area area, just around the corner from where an incident of alleged police brutality would result in the death of a black man later that spring, and spur riots and curfews that would impact many.

The next day, William's basketball coach would contact his teacher, stating that William didn't know how to get to school. And so the teacher, with permission from the school and his aunt, began to pick up William and his brothers in the morning and drive them to school. She bought him clothes for school, along with supplies and snacks. She checked on his homework every morning, and arranged for his younger brothers to come to William's school at the end of their day to meet up with their older brother to get home.

Over the course of the coming weeks, William's grades improved. He was named captain of the middle school basketball team, and finished 8th grade on the honor roll.

The teacher signed him up and took him to his first day of high school, later gaining permission and advocating to change his high school to one that better met his needs. She attends all parent-teacher conferences (with permission), corresponds with teachers, and is the advocate/liaison for courses, activities and projects on William's behalf. She attends his football and basketball games, and has continued for four years to have William check in with her at least once per week.

William's story is not new for students in an urban school district. However, his success, especially for a black male in such a setting, is profound.

Mentors often appear when and where we least expect them. But some mentors provide more than a keen insight into our growth and development. They provide leadership in the purest sense.

Sometimes they change lives forever.

The teacher is my daughter. And I will remember this story as a clear reminder that mentors provide the best examples of leadership.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael Meath', with a large, sweeping initial 'M'.

Michael Meath
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