

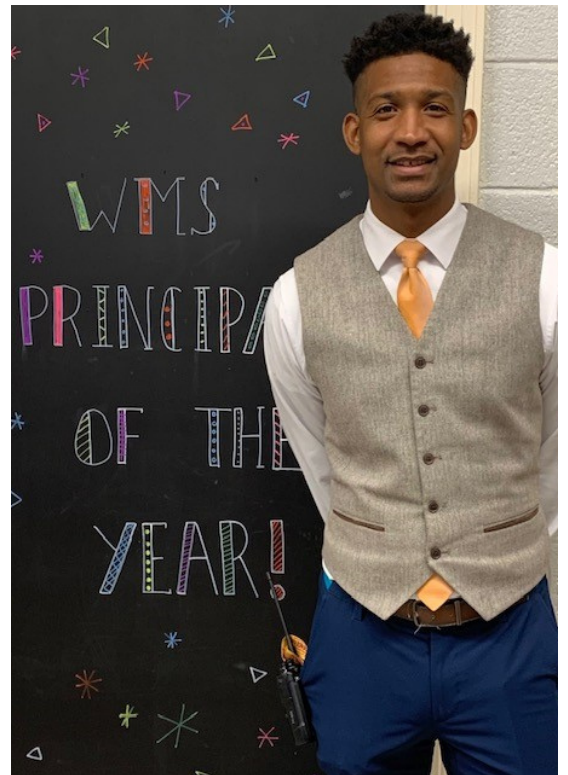
The Lift Every Voice series spotlights the individual voices in our alliance who guide us to wrestle with entrenched inequities and structural racism as we all learn, listen and develop strategies for change.

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I see grave inequities. Folks don't have the same understanding of what life means in impoverished communities.

There's survival happening in communities where there's high poverty, just survival. It's day in, day out. That's an absolute crime.

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As a kid, Paul Travers struggled to learn to read. Today, he is a GCS Principal of the Year. Travers uses his passion to create a dynamic school culture of hope and excellence to put kids on a positive life trajectory.

He and his wife (also an educator) have 4 young children. Travers has a gift for clearly seeing each individual student and staff member, while also widening his lens to view issues of inequity and the opportunity gaps that his students face.

Take a few minutes to read his inspiring story.

What's something you wish people knew about you?

I love being a principal, but my passion is making sure that our communities are connecting to one another, speaking the same language, and working together. In communities where we have high poverty, we must work together to make sure that they can be hopeful. We can change the trajectory of a community when we infuse hope into it. Hope is what changes things.

Tell me about your schooling growing up.

We were doing a basketball camp for elementary kids. I was a camp counselor, and the basketball coach was our school assistant principal. I remember seeing his interactions with kids thinking, "Man, that is a really cool job." What drew me into education and what makes me want to stay in this principal seat for a long time is the connection to community. That's really what drives me. It keeps me going every single day in this seat. That ability to make the connections so kids are hopeful that they can do anything and go anywhere they want. There are so many groups of people that are doing so many great things, yet there's so much isolation among those great things, and we can connect. Let's say, "How can we work together to make an impact and change the community?"

Do you remember when you first became aware of the concept of race?

My parents taught me to do my best every single time and things will be taken care of. They would acknowledge racism or inequities in the way I might be perceived. My parents focused on my character, and being able to project love, be loving to one another. Hold myself to high standards. Hold myself to high character. I think that's something that was a protective measure, without having to address the systemic racial issues. In the end, my parents wanted me to look on people with love. They wanted me to look on people and be loving and not to have an anger or detest, or for me to fall into my own stereotypes. Understanding is empathy. When you do life with someone, you see the steps that they go through. That absolutely changes the way you function, the way you live, and the way you treat folks.

So did you have role models in this work as you were growing up? Did you have Black teachers, Black administrators. You know, that kind of model?

I had a fourth-grade teacher who was a Black woman and I had my high school administrator. There was also an elementary school administrator who was a Black male. That's it. That's one thing I wanted to be intentional about at Washington. I also think it's super important for little Black boys and little Black girls to see folks that are in the majority, the White folks, love on them and treat them really well. That is huge.