



52 NIGHT HERON - CHAPEL HILL, NC 27517 - P: 800-874-1100 - E: PHIL@LEARNINGFORLIVING.COM

Sounding Off On School Culture |

“Supporting students with a biracial background”

Guest: Dr. Eric Jackson II, Indianapolis, Indiana

- 1) **First two weeks of school, focus on relationship building.** I don't do any work with my students at all. I tell them about my family, my life, my journey, etc. Then I ask all my students to tell me what they like about school or don't like, etc. The majority of my students tell me they don't like rules, and I tell them, “Well you're in luck because we don't have rules in my classroom. We have procedures, but we don't have rules.” I get to know my students so well that first two weeks that they're know I'll notice if they're not there the next day.
- 2) **Engage with your students in every environment you see them in – not just your classroom.** If I see my student in the hallway, I go say “hey” to them and I'll chase them down the hallway until they say hello back! I'll spend time with them in the cafeteria, I'll walk them to the bus, etc. I tell them that I'm looking forward to seeing them tomorrow, or reminding them that I can call their mom or dad to make sure they're squared away with homework if they want me to, etc.
- 3) **Give special privileges to the first person in your classroom.** I let whoever is first choose the radio station that we'll listen to while we're getting ready to start the lesson (While kids are getting adjusted, setting up their laptops, etc.) It gives them motivation to want to hurry to your classroom.
- 4) **Have a good understanding of your student's view of their race or ethnicity.** During my parent-teacher conferences, I'll ask the parent “How does your child identify themselves in terms of race?” so that I can make sure I'm incorporating people that they can relate to and be inspired by. There are a lot of great opportunities bi-racial students have - but they need support to get to where it is actually beneficial.
- 5) **Recognize there can be some emotional problems that face students who are bi-racial.** If I have a black male student who lives with his single mom, who is white, he doesn't have a role model at home who looks like him. The only imagery he has is what he's seeing on the evening news - which generally isn't positive. So they internalize that and think, “If I'm a black male, this is how I'm supposed to act.” I tell my counselors that they have to be up-to-date on biracial identity models because it plays a big role in our students behavior.
- 6) **When dealing with a bi-racial student, don't just see them as a “minority.”** Look beyond their skin color. Ask them who they see themselves to be. Ask them what kind of music they listen to. Talk to their parents about what people are in their lives influencing them. Those things are more indicative of how they see themselves than how they look on the surface.

Books to recommend to your bi-racial students:

“Passing” – Nella Larsen (middle/high school aged)

“The Girl Who Fell From The Sky” – Heidi Durrow (middle/high school aged)

“Mixed Me” - Taye Diggs (elementary age)

