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Title: The Delicate Relationship Between Black Fatherhood and Educating Children with Special Needs

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There is a unique bond between fathers and sons, especially when they each must navigate through an educational system where they are both equally and extremely underrepresented. Bobby Frazier, a black male in Dekalb County, GA, represents 2% of black male educators in this country. His son, Bobby Jr. a black male student in Dekalb County, represents nearly 2% of male students who have been diagnosed with Autism, according to the Metropolitan Atlanta Developmental Disabilities Surveillance Program (MADDSP).

During Autism Awareness Month, I interviewed Mr. Frazier to learn more about his unique perspective as a father, autism advocate, and one of few black male educators in the nation, in order to tell the story of the amazing bond that he and his son share. According to author Chandra Whitfield, the 2 percent of those who represent black male educators in America does not reflect how significant they are to our students-especially young black boys.

She highlights the impact that regular exposure to a positive black man can have on these students in her article, [Only Two Percent of Teachers are Black Men, Yet Research Confirms They Matter](#). Although black male educators have been considered rarity, Bobby Jr. is one of the lucky young black boys who have access to one of the few 2% black male educators as both a role model and father.

A [2011 study](#) of subjective quality of life for parents of children with autism spectrum disorders, revealed that fathers who raise a child with autism reported higher levels of stress, parenting issues, and less life

satisfaction than a father raising a child without the autism disorder. However, Bobby expresses, “I have always been an advocate of children who faced these types of challenges.” Bobby discovered earlier on as a teacher that he had a purpose to work with kids with autism.

“As father and son, the one thing that is key to the bond that Bobby and I share is understanding and acknowledging what’s important to him. He loves a lot of things and so the first step is allowing his love of things not to get too out of hand, but also cultivate that love. We make it a point to have family time and outings so that he develops naturally in terms of his education so that he understands that school is not just inside a building.” Bobby emphasizes that he plays and talks with his son as though he is a regular nine-year-old kid.

“I must be mindful that he is very smart yet at the same time realize that he does have a disorder. He has started to develop at a normal rate in terms of his understanding of right and wrong and how to control his impulses and we must constantly remind him about how to control them. He attends therapy for his disorder, and we attend with him to ensure we can implement some of the things there are suggesting and using.”

According to the CDC, Dekalb and Gwinnett counties have approximately 24,113 children who are around 8 years of age. 41% of students are black and 27% of students are white. Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in Georgia reflects that boys are four times more likely to test positive. However, there is very little difference in how ASD impacts black boys and white boys. When asked why it is important for him to advocate for autism awareness, especially as an educator of color, Mr. Frazier shared how he became involved prior to knowing that his son would even be diagnosed.

“It was something that GOD had prepared me for three years prior to Bobby being born.” He previously worked at a high school called Gables Academy (which catered to kids with autism/on the spectrum and

many other disabilities). He also believes that best practice for increasing success for our children is to ensure that, “they have entrance into mainstream society.”

In the 2018, study of [African American Fathers Raising an Autistic Child](#), author Shannon Latoya Burns-Darden concluded that there was very limited research on this perspective. However, through her findings and research, she confirmed that fathers felt there was a lack of autism knowledge and awareness specifically in the African American communities. Bobby attributes much of his success with his son by first educating himself, and encouraging others to do the same as well as to advocate for Autism Awareness. Additionally, as an educator, advocate, and parent Bobby is appreciative of the role that community engagement plays in providing the much-needed support for him and other families that are navigating through this process. “As we prepare our kids for the real world, we must ensure that they are given every opportunity, the right tools, and support so that they can thrive in doing what they love.”

Bobby describes the most efficient method in establishing this support system is to, “[offer] the community more information as well as classes for those who wanted to be informed. There are many opportunities and events to be a part of showing your support, but even seeking out a family who is dealing with the disorder and build a relationship with them. Volunteer at schools and spend time talking with a child who has the disorder.

Just like every year, Bobby and Bobby had been planning to participate in the annual Autism Speaks April Autism walk (autismspeaks.org). However, COVID19 disrupted the event this year. They are both looking forward to sharing in the festivities in January 2021.

You can contribute to the educational enrichment of young black boys by advocating for organizations that specifically and aggressively recruit and support black male educators. Additionally, Autism Speaks, is one of several organizations that supports families like the Fraziers both locally and nationally. They

provide opportunities for individuals to learn about the journey of being a family of autism. You can also volunteer, advocate, donate and learn more about the opportunities for community engagement and involvement with schools and with families.