

# Dane County Exec Parisi: Dane County government a “bright spot” in employment opportunities for African Americans

Posted on Thursday, Jan 12, 2023

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A survey of employers in the Greater Madison Area shows that African Americans are consistently not getting key advancement or promotion in business and in many other sectors. Despite this, the African American-Jewish Friendship Group of Madison’s recent report refers to Dane County government as a “bright spot” by employing African Americans at rates that equal or exceed the percentage of African Americans living in Dane County.

In the Dane County area, the percentage of the population identifying as African American is 5.5 percent. In Dane County government, the percentage of each survey category employing African Americans (non-professional, professional, administrative, total board) equals or exceeds the percentage of African Americans living in Dane County. Roughly 35 percent of African Americans in Dane County government work in professional or administrative capacities. The county not only has a workforce diversity plan, but an office dedicated to the plan.

“Having good intentions and creating a plan are important, but they are only useful if the organization has the energy and resources to actually follow through on implementation. Dane County has routinized this process to ensure that diversity and inclusion are part of what we do on a daily basis,” said County Executive Parisi. “It is part of our recruitment, hiring, training, retention and advancement efforts, and is a defining feature of who we are as an organization.”

Roughly half of the employers in the survey had hiring plans to increase diversity,

yet an analysis shows that, in many cases, just the presence of a plan has little relationship with the employment of African Americans as a whole or in administrative or supervisory positions. Success in attracting Black employees and students varies depending upon the employer's motivation to do so. Obstacles of location, salary, and institutional racism can be overcome by persistence, planning, empathy, and cultural competence at the executive level.

"The African American-Jewish Friendship Group's Survey Committee is now talking with employers who had a successful diversity plan to find how and why the plans gave the desired results. That information will be disseminated to help all employers achieve their diversity goals," said Bruce Thomadsen, study co-author and Ph.D. Professor Emeritus of UW Medical Physics.

The report acknowledges the City of Madison, Dane County, and the Madison Metropolitan School District have made real strides in recent appointments of African Americans to top agency posts, such as the City of Madison Police Chief, Dane County Sheriff, and Superintendent of Madison Metropolitan School District.

Other bright spots where the percentages of administrative and executive positions better reflect the population include:

- the City of Madison, for all categories
- Not-for-profits boards and staffs
- Several of the region's school boards
- Madison College for non-professionals and administrators
- The University of Wisconsin-Madison, where the hiring of assistant professors has increased over the last twelve years to 6 percent African American, and the percentage for administrators is 5 percent.

The African American-Jewish Friendship Group of Madison's full report on [African American Employment Patterns in the Greater Madison, Wisconsin Region: 2021-2022](#) can be accessed online.