

## It Isn't in My Blood to Walk Away from Education

By Shawnta S. Barnes - July 17, 2018



Shawnta S. Barnes' sons and nieces checking out her new space at her new job.

*Note: If you have not read "Why This Teacher Leader is Leaving IPS" and the follow-up piece "Departing IPS Teacher Leader Answers Your Questions," start there first before reading this piece. This will be the final piece in this mini-series.*

Last year, I completed my 12th year as an educator. The first eight years of my career, I was a middle school English teacher and during one of those years, I also taught a course of 9th-grade creative writing. During year nine, I was an elementary English as a New Language teacher where I had the opportunity to work with language minority students who collectively spoke 13 different languages and I also worked with refugee students. During year ten, I was a K-6 literacy coach. Year 11, I was a K-2 literacy coach and last school year, during year 12, I was a 9th/10th grade English/language arts Multi-classroom leader where I coached 9th and 10th grade English teachers and taught 10th and 11th grade English.



The last five years of my middle school English career, I taught in the Metropolitan School District of Wayne Township on Indy's west side and next school year, I am returning to Wayne Township in a role I have not done yet. I possess five licenses: English/language arts 5-12, Reading P-12, English as a New Language P-12, Library/Media P-12 and Building Level

Administrator P-12, so I have options in different areas as well as different levels. Although I know many people were expecting me to state I am going to be an assistant principal, I have decided to accept an elementary library/media specialist position. I decided to obtain my library/media license while I was in Wayne Township so returning to the district in this role seems fitting.

### **I felt like giving up.**

Canadian singer Shawn Mendes sings in his popular hit, "In My Blood"

*Help me, it's like the walls are caving in*

*Sometimes I feel like giving up*

*But I just can't*

*It isn't in my blood*

My boys and I love this song and we belt it out any time it plays on the radio and it has been a bit of an anthem for me lately because I started thinking about giving up and walking away from education. I told a colleague and friend that I was thinking about taking a break from education and you would have thought I had started cursing. The friend reminded me of all these accolades I had and how great I was with students who other educators had difficulty with and this person assured me I was just having a moment. I wasn't having a moment; I had been thinking about walking away the entire school year.

### **I have no regrets, but...**

If you were keeping count, you have realized that I have had four different job titles during the last four school years. The first change was by choice; the last three were not. I gained knowledge and grew as a professional during the last four school years, so I do not regret any role I have had. If you include my student teaching experience with seniors, I have literally taught students in every grade K-12; not many educators can say that nor have the

ability or skills to work with students of various ages. I count each experience as a gain.

I believe I am a good educator but I strive for greatness because that's what students deserve. To grow, you need to stay rooted in a place for a while. When I was in IPS, I felt like I was on a merry-go-round and the teacher leader stipends they were throwing at me were no longer enough to make me stay on the ride.

If I'm going to be really honest with you all, I should share this. I had a bad feeling before I found out officially that my last position in IPS was going to be eliminated, so I started making my exit plans. I had my first out of district interview during the first week of school right across the street from my school at Starbucks. This is my life. This is my career and I had to start steering the direction of what I would do next and where I would go next.

### **You are wasting your gift.**

Some churches do spiritual gift classes. There's an inventory included that identifies your gifts. I have taken the class and inventory three times: as a teen, in college, and after I married my husband and I got the same results in the same order each time: administration, teaching, and service.

Some people know I turned down two assistant principal jobs. "Who does that? You have the skills; you have the talent – the gift." That is what one of my colleagues and friends said. I'm not a title chaser. I'm married to a Database Administrator for the State of Indiana; he has a demanding job. We are also parents to twin boys who will be second graders in a few weeks. I know I am capable of being an assistant principal, but I also know I get ONE chance to be a great mom; I can be an administrator later. My husband and I decided that having two administrators in the house at this time isn't right for us.

### **I need stability.**

Make me say yes. That's the attitude I had about interviews. I said no a whole bunch of times including to two other media specialist positions. I'm not

interested in being your token black hire. I'm not interested in serving under a weak leader. I'm not interested in another newly created role. I'm not interested in driving too far away from my house.

The reason I originally left Wayne is that I wanted to try something different and I wasn't able to do that while I was in the district. A better, more well-rounded Shawnta is returning to the district. I'm a risk taker and I believe you should go for it and not beat yourself up even if it doesn't turn out the way you planned.

Shawn Mendes also sang these lyrics, "Keep telling me that it gets better. Does it ever?" That is what I was wondering all during last school year in IPS. For the sake of the IPS students I love and served, I hope it does. I couldn't do it anymore and based on the exit of district-level administrators, building level administrators, teachers, and support staff in IPS; I know I'm not alone. I jumped off the merry-go-round and I'm happy about where I landed. When I was teaching middle school English in Wayne, I wasn't worried about having to reapply for my job or being told my position was cut or fearing a salary freeze. I knew I would have the same job with decent pay as long as I was doing my job well.

### **It isn't in my blood to quit.**

Although, I did not know when I left Wayne Township that I was going to have so many different job titles, I don't regret any of them. They made me a stronger educator. I'm an educator and I'm compelled to stay in the fight. I thought about staying home, but it isn't in my blood to quit and walk away.

During my last year in IPS, I never unpacked my boxes; I hid them in the cabinets. I didn't believe my role would last so I didn't see the point. At my new school, my boxes are already unpacked. I believe I going to be staying for a while.

*Note: This is only part of what is new for me. If you want to know what is new for me in higher education, read [Monday Musings: My Higher Ed Journey](#).*