



To Improve Education, We Need the Entire Story

By Shawnta S. Barnes - August 13, 2018

A little over a week ago, I was in Detroit. I attended part of the National Association for Black Journalists (NABJ) Convention. I was part of the panel The Importance of Educating our Black Children along with Wayfinder CEO Chris Stewart, InspireNOLA Public Charter School CEO Jamar McNeely, and NewSchools Venture Fund Managing Partner Dr. Deborah M. McGriff. The panel was moderated by NBC News Education Correspondent Rehema Ellis. Based on the panelists' interactions with each other and responses to members of the packed, standing room only, audience, one fact was abundantly clear: Black people need to take the reins and tell our stories, completely and unfiltered.

Many times, when a story is told about us or a story is told that includes us, it is not written by a person of color and the story doesn't highlight all of the important details. When details are omitted, problems can't be solved because problems weren't ever brought to light. It didn't take much time for me to come across an education story about a school that is majority minority where details were missing. I knew details were missing because the article was about my sons' school Crooked Creek Elementary in the Metropolitan School District of Washington Township (MSDWT). According to the last published data by IDOE Compass, only 28% of Crooked Creek students are white, the rest are minorities with black students making up 46% of the population.



Recently, I read the piece “Special rooms help students calm down, refocus before acting out.” The piece highlights the Amygdala Reset Room piloted at my sons' school which is featured in the video and article. Deanna Nibarger, MSDWT social and emotional behavior coach set up this room and spoke to

parents at the end of last school year at a PTO meeting about the room and the education she has been sharing with students about their amygdala.

As an educator and parent, I think the room is a good idea. Going to the office should be the absolute last resort and children have to learn ways to recenter and refocus their bodies and thoughts. When students are sent to the office, the principal or the assistant principal doesn't have time to help students make different choices or show them how to calm down while they are in the midst of being upset.

In the video Nibarger says, "This is a space where you can go with an adult and then reflect." The key words are, "with an adult." There is not an adult stationed in the room and the school has limited adults available who are able to take children to the room and help them reset. This means the room isn't being used as it should to help students process. Students end up getting sent to the office instead which this space was supposed to prevent.

When Nibarger spoke the parents at the end of last school year, I asked her how this room has been working since there are few adults available to take students to the room. She explained that she did not want an adult in the room all day because teachers would just send kids there and would not use it properly. She also acknowledged getting students to the room was an issue. Crooked Creek does have a few instructional assistants. They can sometimes cover the class so the teacher can take the child or the assistant could take the child. This isn't always an option since assistants are typically engaged with students in instruction. When there aren't people available to take the child to the room and talk them through the situation to help them reset, the room becomes pointless.

It is not clear to me as a parent how much this space is actually used. I wish the article would have addressed this. I also wish the article would have provided actual data on how effective this room allegedly is. Nibarger says, "Kids are spending more time in their classrooms, less time in the office." How much less time? Which kids?

I know Washington Township has been taking action to address the disproportionality of kids of color being sent to the office. How does this

room help with this goal? As a parent of color, I want answers. I want the entire story. As a mom, whose sons have been sent to the office for making poor choices, I know this room was not an option for them because no one was available to take them there. I have only been made aware of one time when one of my sons used the room.

Don't paint a rosy picture of how great a practice is in a school if it is not implemented the way it should and you have provided no concrete data to support your claims. If the whole story was told, the problems with the room could potentially be addressed and the room could be used properly...maybe this piece will help make this happen.