



Whose Responsibility Is It?

By Shawnta S. Barnes - April 3, 2017

**“ WHAT
CAN WE DO
TO MAKE
THINGS BETTER
RIGHT NOW? ”**

If I drive for 15 minutes from my house, I will drive right by a few schools rated A or B, but if I drive for 15 minutes from my house in the opposite direction, I will drive by schools rated D or F. What many D and F schools have in common is they serve a high population of minority

students and/or a high population of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Regardless of political party affiliation, no one wants a child to attend a failing school. What we continue to debate about is who is responsible for ensuring all students, regardless of race or socioeconomic status, has access and are able to attend excellent schools.

Under President Obama, rules were included in the Every Student Succeeds Act to hold schools accountable for its students' academic performance. Earlier this week, President Trump removed those rules. He also removed requirements for programs that train K-12 educators. Democrats have been vocal about why they disagree with the President's decision and fear without these federal regulations in place that failing schools, many who serve minorities and students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, will continue to perform poorly.

During his campaign for President, President Trump made it clear that he was going to undo any legislation passed by President Obama that he felt was unnecessary. He stated this several times; we knew this was coming. Instead of burning energy arguing and complaining, we need to focus on what we can control and work on alternate solutions. If the only way schools can be held accountable

for their outcomes is through federal regulation, then we have a bigger problem. Instead of going straight to the top, we need begin our efforts from our locus of control. Educators, parents, and community members need to get involved in local government and involved in their local schools. Even if you do not have children or do not have children in school any longer, you still need to be involved.

National Equity Atlas, a data and policy tool to ensure equity, states “These “high-poverty schools” are charged with educating children who need more supports and services, yet are given inadequate funding, leading to a growing population of young people of color who are under-prepared to succeed in the workforce.” Children who do not receive a good education are more likely to become adults who are not model citizens — adults who are more likely to commit crimes, end up in jail, struggle with mental health, and have children who follow the same path. Yes, we need schools to be held accountable, but we also need to help them. Regulations, be it federal or local, forces school to do what is in their power to meet the requirements, but regulations alone will not solve the problems of failing schools. If it had, we would not be in the situation we are in now.

Yes, it is a blow to have legislation passed under one administration undone by the next, but isn't it time to stop arguing and start working towards our common goal? In *Difficult Conversations: How to Discuss What Matter Most*, the authors share, “If you find yourself being swallowed up by a conflict, if you begin to see your very identity as tied to the fight, try to take a step back and remember why you are fighting.” While we are arguing over regulations, we are failing to acknowledge what we can do. If schools in our community are failing, that's on us.

President Trump, as shown by his pick of Betsy DeVos as Education Secretary, wants to lessen the role of the federal government in schools. We still have local government. We still have organizations who want to help all students succeed. If we don't take responsibility now, if we can't stop getting lost in debate and don't make a plan for helping our schools as the federal grip loosens, we will be responsible for dealing with the outcomes of students from underperforming schools for years to come.