



I Won't Stop Writing, Even If It Costs Me My Job

By Educator Barnes – April 25, 2019

When I first started writing education articles in January 2017, I sort of played it safe. I would take a stance here or there, but I didn't want to ruffle too many feathers. I was concerned about what other educators would think, the educators who could determine whether or not I would get hired. I know I'm a good teacher. My evaluations are good, and my data is good, but being a good educator at my school only isn't enough. There are children across this country that need people like me fighting for them. As I rage into battle, I wonder if my advocacy will isolate me. What if it blocks future opportunities?

So, I talked to a mentor about my internal conflict. My mentor said, "Well, are you telling the truth?" I looked at him quizzically. He went on to explain that if I was honest, I should not worry about what other people think. If I was fighting for what I believe in, I should not back down. As I gained other education writer allies, they told me to keep the course. One writer even said, "If you are ruffling feathers, then you are pointing out an issue that needs to be addressed, and that causes people to become uncomfortable and lash out." Our education system has issues. It's not going to change and improve for students of color if I'm afraid to speak the truth and move from advocate to activist.

...and lash out is exactly what has happened. This school year was the first school year, where my writing and my job as an educator clashed. Last school year, I was employed by Indianapolis Public Schools (IPS). I wrote pieces that both supported and questioned what was happening in my former district. Even though people at the district and building level didn't agree with every piece I wrote, they did not make it a point of contention or issue during or outside the school hours. That has not been the case this school year.

When I worked in IPS, I did not have screenshots of what I wrote sent to my phone. Colleagues didn't interrupt me while I was teaching to complain about what I wrote. I wasn't sent emails or direct messages warning me to settle down. An anonymous complaint wasn't sent about how my writing is causing problems for the learning and teaching environment of the school. This school year, I returned to Wayne Township, where I worked for five school years, four school years ago, and I have experienced all of that. What I write, say, or do is being constantly analyzed and scrutinized.

My husband (and some of his friends) wonder when enough will be enough. After spring break, we had to complete a form stating whether we would return, leave, or request a transfer in the district. I filled out the form to say I will return next school year. I'm really not interested in doing a job search. I really like my job, and I know elementary library/media specialist jobs are hard to obtain. You only need one for a building, and some schools share a person in my role.

At the end of the day, my writing is a living and breathing calling card. Almost everyone who has interviewed me since I began writing education articles has read a few of my articles. I learned this is a blessing and not a curse. If you still want to interview me knowing that I fight hard for children of color and will ask questions (and offer solutions) when a situation is not right, then I might be a good fit for your school...but I thought that when I signed this contract. What is comical is the articles colleagues complained about was not even about my current school. I write about my experiences and the experiences of others. Moreover, if the issues I am raising is

causing discomfort, then it's time to look inward and not outward at other sources. I'm here for students not to appease or soothe adults.

I know I can get another job. God controls that, not an administrator and not a colleague. No conversation, threat, complaint, reprimand, or any other attempts to come at or for me is going to work. Even though I have disagreed with administrators on points before, I've not ever had one give me a bad reference because I have good classroom management, make great relationships with students, and take students' academic achievement seriously. I know everyone doesn't get my personality, my views, or my actions, but at the end of the day, am I the best person in front of the students? Are my words and actions causing students to not learn? If the answer is no, then you are wasting time and energy.

I'm at the point where I choose not to engage. I won't discuss my life outside of school at school anymore. I don't follow or allow anyone from my district to follow my social media accounts. My Facebook has always been like that, but now I have applied that standard to all my accounts. No, it doesn't stop people from reading what I write, but it stops them from sending me direct messages or from communicating with me on social media when I don't want to communicate with them. Also, if someone is lame enough to create an account just to peep and see what I do, that says more about them than it would ever say about me.

We need warrior educators, not educators who are afraid to take a stance. Even though I have put a clear line in the sand between my personal life and school life, I still will speak up when necessary. If my words, written or verbal, are that scary, intimidating, or inflammatory (these are their words, not my words), then I will gladly welcome another education opportunity at another school. I can't afford to put down my pen or close my laptop because I still have so much more to say.