



Teacher Confessions: A Student Threatened to Kill Me and was in My Class the Next Day

By Educator Barnes – November 24, 2019

I know all too well the weight of the invisible tax of being a black educator. There is an assumption that I can better connect with black students and discipline them because I am black. I do have similar experiences to some of my black students, but I do not believe those experiences, or my skin color is the reason I have been labeled a good classroom manager. I

learned through trial and error and by learning from other teachers who managed their classrooms well. Even being the educator that my colleagues would send their students to or being the back up to in school suspension (ISS) when ISS was full, I still had students I could not reach.

Recently, an RTV6 investigation revealed that hundreds of teachers are hurt by students. I have been one of those teachers. There were outbursts I could not control. I had a student throw a literature book, these books tend to be several inches thick, at me. Luckily, the student missed, but the book flew right by my face. I've been stabbed with a pencil. I have been shoved, had my toes stepped on, and kicked in the leg. Although this report focuses on physical aggression, I think it is important to address the verbal abuse and threats educators endure.

I had a student call me a bitch for a duration of 30 minutes while I was teaching. Of course, I called to have the student removed. No one came. Ten minutes later, I called back and the school office phone went to voice mail. I had trained my students to ignore outbursts, but it was difficult to continue with the play we were reading with the student calling me that word in the background. That's not the worse offense. Twice, I have had students threaten to kill me.

Early in my career, a child wrote a note about how she wanted to kill me. I confiscated the note and called the office. The student was then removed. The next day, the student was back in class. I was told it was just a misunderstanding. I'm not sure how I misunderstood what was written or what was confusing about a student wanting me dead. The student strolled into my class the next day and mouthed the word die to me when I would walk by her desk. I didn't bother reporting that since I didn't expect any consequences.

The second time my life was threatened was about halfway through my career thus far. I was teaching, and a student stood up and stuck his thumb up and pointer finger out to simulate a gun. The student yelled, "Bang, bang, I wish you would die!" I called the office, and the student was removed. This student did get suspended for five days, and I believe the student had remorse when he returned. One of the options was also switching the student to another English class after the suspension. I never felt like that option was really on the table. I was told how difficult the student was and that switching classes would be hard for the student. People know I go hard to advocate for difficult students, but at what point does my safety and well-being take precedence?

But, I am also a parent. I'm a parent of a child that has kicked a teacher in a fit of anger, so I understand the other side. I definitely did not want my son to get suspended or kicked out of school. Luckily, he didn't. There has to be some middle ground, so teachers can feel safe and so students who have outbursts improve and get better.

It is mentally taxing to know that the school administration will leave you high and dry because you are a good classroom manager. That's been mostly the story of my career in education. Feeling unsafe at our place of employment, the school, has been the story for too many educators, and this must change.