



## All I Want for Christmas: Shawnta Barnes's Educator Christmas Wish List

By Shawnta S. Barnes – December 24, 2018

Making a Christmas list is a dreaded task for me. My dad asked me to submit my Christmas list (yes, my dad still asks his daughters, who are all grown, for a list), and it took me three

weeks to turn it in. When it comes to education, that's a different story. I know exactly what I want. Here's my list.

**The percentage of teachers of color in schools should reflect the percentage of students of color.**

I only had two black teachers during my K-12 education, and one, who was a gym teacher, referred to me as a weakling. Because of that, I only really count one. Since Pre-K 3, my kids have not had any black classroom teachers. They did have some black caretakers while in daycare. I hope they will have a black teacher, who is talented and not verbally abusive, at some point during their education. As an educator, I also want more colleagues who look like me.

**Teachers who can't help their students learn should be coached to improved or counseled out of the profession.**

I'm tired of crappy teachers being able to keep their jobs. I'm tired of principals not helping these teachers or showing them the door. I'm mad that unfortunately, my sons have had some teachers who did not meet the expectations my husband and I have for what a good teacher should be.

**Schools should stop finding alternative ways to exclude black students from class to avoid high suspension data and find ways to help students stay in class.**

Can someone explain to me why one of my sons, who I rarely heard from teachers about until this year, has spent more time out of class this school year now that the school has moved to an alternate discipline plan to keep kids out of the office since the other years he has been in the school combined? You know I've asked, and I still haven't been given a satisfactory answer. If you follow my writing, trust and believe, I will be hitting this topic hard in 2019.

**Parent/Teacher Associations need to do more than send sign-up genius for items for class parties and find ways to help the school improve.**

At the end of last school year, I was asked to become the co-president of the Parent/Teacher Organization at my children's school. I passed. First, I am super busy. Second, I created the PTO website as a way to contribute but not be overly involved. Third, the PTO is not involved in the type of work I want to do as a parent. I've been to enough meetings to know that they probably won't. When they do, I'll be ready to roll up my sleeves.

**Education journalists should stop writing click-bait stories trying to convince us that all charter schools are bad and traditional schools will save black students.**

Recently, *Chalkbeat* shared an article about charter schools failing to serve special needs students. They did include one brief statement to show this is also occurring in traditional public schools. What about those traditional public schools that offer services, but black parents don't realize their children aren't properly served? I want all education writers to do better and dive deep. Tell the entire story even if it is not the story you want to tell. That's exactly why I going to write a piece about black teachers who can't teach.

**Administrators should let educators identify what they need for professional development rather than prescribing generalized training.**

This is year 13 for me. I cannot accept that I should have to sit through trainings in areas that I am proficient. That's exactly what we do in education. Waste teachers' time and ignore their pleas for help in areas where they know they need help.

**Listen to all children, especially black children, when they tell you the truth.**

I know children may not always be truthful, but we need to listen. Last week, my son told me there was nothing in his classroom library he wanted to read. His teacher told me he hadn't thoroughly explored the classroom library. My sons are the most thorough book browsers I know. I have to pull them away from bookshelves, and yes, I mean literally not figuratively. My son recently self-selected one book about the periodic table and another book about climate change. He also has a rock encyclopedia. When he tells me he can't find a book, based on what I know he likes to read, I'm inclined to listen *AND* believe him. This situation is just about books. What about students who bring more pressing issues? We need to listen.

This is just a snippet of what I want. I never believed in Santa Claus because my parents didn't believe they should tell me a white man was going swoop in and bring me what I wanted. During my winter break, I read *Polite Protest: The Political Economy of Race in Indianapolis 1920-1970* by Richard B. Pierce. Although there was much that resonated with me in the book, this quote stood out, "One of the most consistent themes expressed by readers of the *Recorder* was the ease with which certain members of the black community accepted scraps from the table rather than demanding a full meal."

I don't want only part of my list because I don't want scraps from the table. I don't want some white education reformer Santa Claus swooping in to save the black children. I want everything on my list and more. For Christmas, in regards to education, I demand a full damn meal, and I want other black parents, educators, education reformers, advocates, and activists to demand the same.

Merry Christmas!

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