



## Every School District Needs a Community Coalition

By Educator Barnes – January 27, 2021

Schools are an integral part of every community; however, too many times, the community gets left out of the education conversation. This needs to change. High performing schools are great for the community and the children that are educated in those schools. Community members should be able to have their voices heard.

In Washington Township, where I reside, I recently joined the Washington Township Community Equity Coalition. The coalition is lead by Dr. Erica Buchanan-Rivera, the new

Director of Equity and Inclusion. At first, I was not sure if I wanted to join. I have been on several committees. Being on a committee requires a time commitment and additional work, whether that is analyzing data, reading literature, or reviewing programs. If I am going to give up my time away from my family, I want it to be meaningful. I want to make an impact.

Since there was no historical data on the effectiveness of the committee, since this committee is new, I decided to give it a chance. I am glad I did. Then, I thought about the people participating that are residents with no children in the district. Many times, school leadership does not engage these stakeholders. When they are engaged, it is solely to get their vote for a school referendum. Schools have to do better.

Business owners and adults without school-age children should always have a seat at the table. Great schools are good for businesses. Those stakeholders might have connections to resources that can help students.

Since I do have two children in the school district, I want the experiences my children are having to be considered when decisions are made. I also want to get more people in the room, people who typically aren't on committees. When I looked across the screen while on Zoom at the last meeting, I saw a few people who I had served with in the past or am serving with currently on another committee.

Whose voices are left out? School leaders must go beyond parent engagement; it has to be community engagement. Community members must know and understand the direction the school district is going. Honestly, community involvement is the least school districts can do ... especially before asking residents to vote to raise their taxes again.