

## Thank You to my African American Teachers

By Shawnta S. Barnes – May 18, 2017



Since 1984, The National Parent Teacher Association has celebrated teachers around the nation during National Teacher Appreciation Week, a week long celebration that takes place in May.

Many of us have a memorable teacher who inspired us and changed our life. Nichole Henley, 3rd grade teacher, leader of Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) at William Penn Elementary School #49, and recently voted Teacher of the Year, was not only inspired by former teachers, but was led to join the teaching profession because of their impact on her life.

When I sit and think about who had the most impact on my life, it was undoubtedly all of my African American teachers. I did not have many. In fact, I can count them on one hand and have a finger leftover – Ms. Cook in kindergarten, Ms. Smith in 4th

grade, Ms. Wilbur in 7th and 8th grade, and Professor Cromwell in the Telecommunications Department at Ohio University.

They were impactful because they made me feel comfortable and pushed me to my fullest potential. They never singled me out. They taught me there is a time and place for slang and a time and place for using proper English. They made me comfortable being an African American. Ms. Smith, my 4th grade teacher, wore her hair curly. Even though people talked about her hair, she exuded confidence and did not let it bother her. It's part of the reason, I have confidence to wear my hair natural today.

Ms. Wilbur, who taught me in 7th & 8th grade, was sure I was going to become a teacher one day, but I fought against it. I earned a degree in communications and pursued another career first. After having my son and seeing how my younger sisters struggled in school, I decided to pursue a master's degree in education. I wanted to become a teacher and make an impact in students' lives, especially for those students who look like me.

Seeing professionals that looked like me and talked like me allowed me to believe I could make the same impact on others. They had a certain mindset that made me believe I am somebody and I could achieve great feats. They held the bar high and continually pushed me to reach it. I find myself building the same confidence in my students each day.

I wonder where my black teachers are now. I wish I could let them know I followed in their footsteps and propel their subtle messages of excellence and acceptance forward. Most of all I want to say, "THANK YOU!"