



It Isn't Happy Holidays for All Students

By Shawnta S. Barnes – December 18, 2018

I mentioned in my [Monday Musings](#) this week that some teachers I mentor are stressed out right now. Some of this stress is due to student behavior. Every day, I see on social media a meme or gif that reference teachers being in survival mode up until we say goodbye to students for two weeks of winter break.

As teachers, we have to remember that being home away from school for two weeks is dreaded by some of our students. School is their refuge. I once had a seventh grader who would tell

these elaborate stories about what he was going to do during the break. It broke my heart. I knew he didn't have a home. His mom and he would crash at different places from time to time. His mom was struggling to make sure he was getting fed. I knew his stories about all the gifts he was getting and the different states he was going to travel to were all lies.

He isn't alone, but at least he had a loving and strong relationship with his mother despite their circumstances. Other students don't even have that. They go home to chaos and to verbal and/or physical abuse. Winter break is seen as a time of constant suffering. When I had students in those situations, some would have outbursts and constantly disrupt class before the break. Others would shut down; they would have no motivation to do any work no matter how many times I would say it is one of the last grades for the report card.

I am not suggesting teachers lower their expectations because of students' circumstances, but I am asking for teachers to have some compassion. We must show some empathy. Yes, a student might be getting on your last nerve. I mean they are gripping that nerve tight and swinging on it hard. Try to remain calm. Maybe this means sending the student to another teacher for a break. If you have a good relationship with the student, maybe this means starting and ending the day with a check-in conversation.

As teachers, we might not be able to change the situations our students will face over winter break. We can at least not be another person coming down hard on the student.