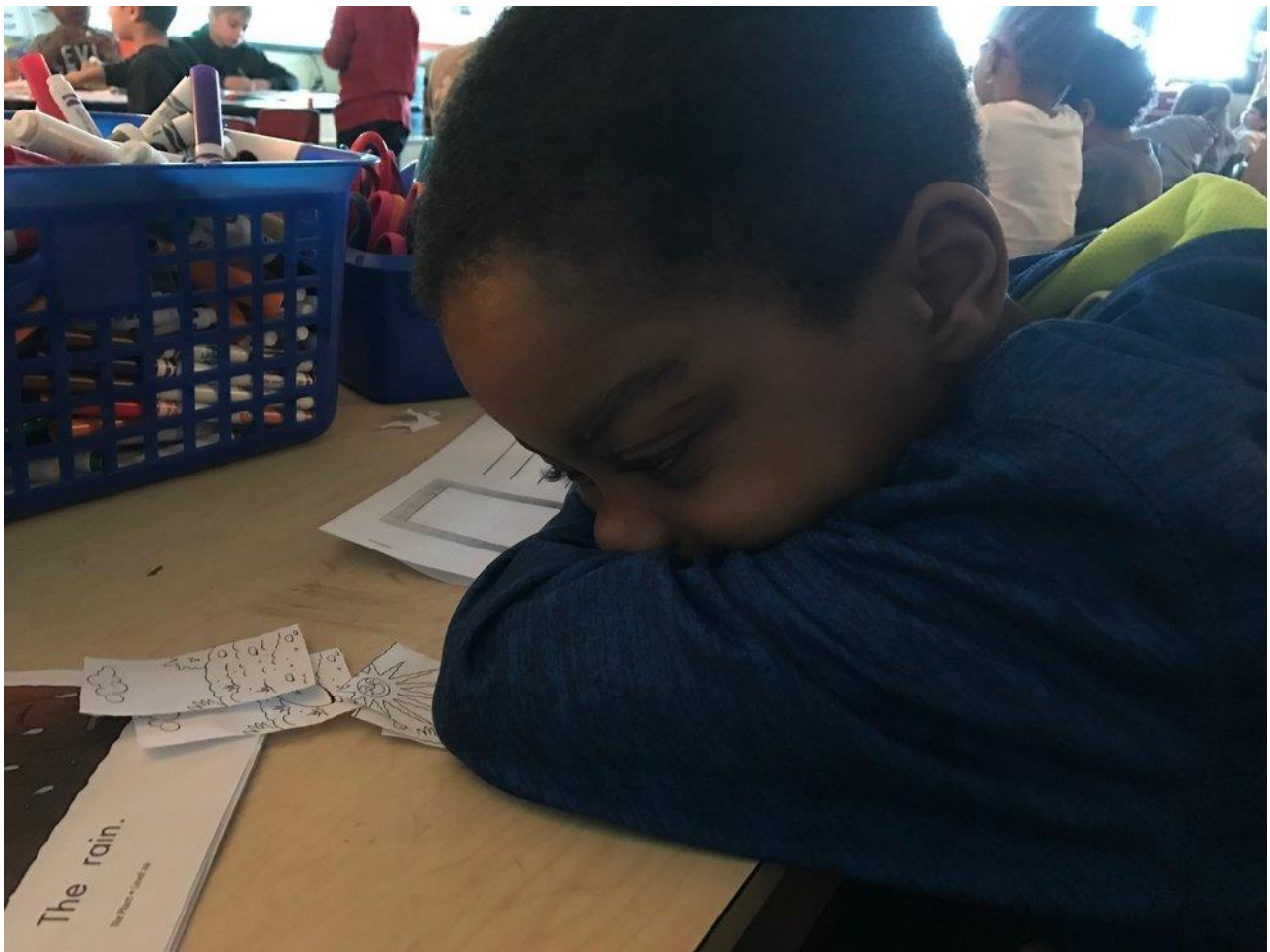


Five Tips to Advocate for Your Child When Your Child's Teacher Quits and Stays

By Shawnta S. Barnes – September 29, 2017



Last year, my twin boys entered kindergarten. A number one question twin parents are asked when their children enter school is, "Will they be in the same class or different classes?" I tell people my boys are siblings who happen to have the same birthday, but they are unique individuals. I believe some twins should be in the same class, but not my twin boys. Because of their tendency to

horseplay and get too engaged with each other, my husband and I decided to separate them when we enrolled them in our neighborhood public school. One son ended up in the class of the teacher who was the teacher of the year the previous school year, but our other son wasn't so lucky.

Last year, while my children were navigating kindergarten, I was taking courses for my school administration license. One concept we talked about was the teacher who quits and stays. This is a teacher, who for whatever reason, has decided to do just enough to get by, but not enough to serve students well. Unfortunately, one of our sons had a teacher who quit and stayed.

What do you do when you know your child is not meeting his or her full potential because of the teacher's lack of effort? Below, I have outlined five tips on how you can advocate for your child when your child's teacher quits and stays.

1. Visit the classroom as much as possible.

Our son was coming home from school unhappy. We were wondering why this was the case. Then a parent of another student in the class said she had seen our son in the hallway a lot or taking walks with the instructional assistant; this was a red flag. My husband and I are not sending our children to school to walk the halls or spend time in the office. I started showing up to school unannounced and sitting in the classroom. When I wasn't available, his grandparents who we included as contacts on his file, went instead. The teacher was not only struggling with our son. She was also struggling to find ways to appropriately and culturally responsively help many students. When she became frustrated, her default was to kick a child out of class or ignore him or her. She did not make much effort to explain or coach the child in making different choices. By no means am I suggesting my child was an angel, but her actions made him feel as if she didn't like him.

At my sons' school, as long as you check-in at the front office, you can observe a class. I previously worked at a school where parents had to schedule observations; that's absurd. Clearly, this is fear on the school's part. If I haven't done anything to warrant you to be concerned about my presence and since my

tax dollars are going to support the school, I should be able to stop by anytime to see if the school is meeting my expectations. Nonetheless, know your school's policy and follow it.

2. Document everything!

At some point, if the situation doesn't change to your liking, a meeting or multiple meetings will be necessary. School personnel can be good at placing the blame on the child, the parent or anyone else who isn't them. When I observed, I took notes. When the teacher would call, email, or send messages on ClassDojo (a classroom management app), I would keep all the records. I compiled my notes and organized them in a Google spreadsheet. When it was time to meet, I could reference specific information. For example, I was able to note how many times my child's teacher had been absent, at times twice a week, because I was tracking everything.

3. Ask for and know the school's policies.

Our son was constantly getting sent out of class which led us to believe he was on the road to suspension. He also was choosing to sit in the back of the class by himself because he felt no one wanted him in class. We found out what the school's stance was on suspending kindergarteners and the discipline policy. We requested anytime he was out of class for any reason, we were called. As I mentioned earlier, he was out of class, and we didn't know until another parent told us. Learning the school's policies allowed us to point out if the teacher was doing her due diligence such as contacting us in a timely manner.

4. Network with other parents.

Sometimes I think my son's teacher believed I was receiving our grapevine information from other teachers in the building since I am also an educator, but other parents gave me a head's up. I recall one parent describing the tone the teacher was using with my son when she had him in the hall yet again. I'm not the most social person. I'm not shy, but I like to keep to myself. When my children entered school, I made it a point to not only attend school events but

to also introduce myself and schedule play dates with other parents so we could connect and watch out for each other's children.

5. Request a meeting and make your case for change.

An older lady I know used to tell me, "A closed mouth gets you nothing." Never let school staff make you feel as if you cannot request a change or disagree with their suggestions. As long as you are willing to work with the school, they should be willing to work with you. The worse part for us was the numerous meetings we had with just the teacher, the teacher and the assistant principal, and the teacher, the principal, and my son. My dad also attended a meeting, and my mom had a meeting with just her and the principal. The responses the teacher gave during the numerous meetings showed she didn't want to do anything differently to help my son. At one meeting, she said, "I can't differentiate for and accommodate everyone." At another meeting, she seemed upset when we requested she stop using ClassDojo to mark behavior for our son. She protested, but we had our request granted and came up with a different way for her to communicate to our child when he was not meeting expectations and to us about any problem she was having with him. Had we never asked for an alternative from the administration, we would have never known it was an option.

After winter break, my son's teacher stopped showing up to school. He would come home and say, "We had different teachers all day today." Apparently, she was calling in so close to the start of the school day, they couldn't get a substitute teacher and different instructional assistants were covering the class throughout the day. We requested our son be moved to another kindergarten class (not his brother's) until the situation was resolved. Later we received a letter from the school stating the teacher had moved to the Virgin Islands (yes, the Virgin Islands). All my husband and I could say was "bon voyage" because being in Indiana in my son's school was not the place for her.

Later another parent said to me, "Shawnta, I think you made that teacher quit." If I did, I don't feel sorry about it. If you study to become a school administrator, you have to learn the process of how to terminate a teacher. Being an academic coach, I struggled with this concept. I tell the

teachers I coach, "I am here to help you become the best educator you can be whether you stay at this school or move on to another school." I believed any educator, with the right support, could improve and some administrators were too hasty with terminations, but I also believe God allows situations to come together in perfect harmony for you to learn a lesson.

Had my son never had this experience, I might not have really thought about the point when a school needs to cut ties and remove a teacher. I believe the principal, assistant principal, behavior specialist, and other staff tried to help my son's teacher. The reality was she didn't want to be helped. She didn't want to change, and she didn't want to be there. It's a disservice to students and other staff when a teacher who quits and stays is not terminated, or the teacher doesn't decide to find a school that is a better fit because it prevents a talented educator who cares and is willing to do what it takes from being placed in that classroom.

Luckily, the teacher who replaced my son's teacher midyear was able to bring stability and a positive learning environment. What's even better is she looped with my son and most of the class for 1st grade this year. This year, our son is performing well academically and isn't kicked out of class all the time. He comes home happy and now loves school. This might not have been the case if my husband and I (and other family members) had not advocated for our son.