



Parents Need to Observe Their Children at School

By Educator Barnes – October 20, 2019

From the moment I placed my children in the care of another adult, I have made it a priority to show up unannounced and see about my children. Since I didn't have the luxury to be a stay at home mom when my boys were born, hire a nanny, or send them to grandparents, I had to put them in daycare. Of course, I visited several daycares before settling on the one I chose. Even though the provider passed my test, I was uneasy. To ease my nerves, I made a point to show up, not to pick them up but to observe. I'm glad I did.

My boys are identical. On one of my visits, the teacher was giving one of my sons medicine, but he wasn't taking any medicine at the time; his brother was. We even sent them in different outfits with bracelets that had their names on them. I don't understand how this happened.

When our children are brand new, we are extra protective. We will go from daycare to daycare trying to find the best one. We will even show up as I did. Parents need to continue this vigilance once their children enter school. Just like the daycare provider was careless in administering medicine, I assert malpractice is happening in some of these classrooms. Fancy websites and convoluted statistics can mask the fact that the environment where our children are spending most of each day Monday through Friday is not a good one.

Once my children entered preschool, I decided I needed to continue checking up on my children. As an educator, I have seen too much happening to children, especially black children, that prevents me from blindly putting my trust into any school. Each teacher must earn my trust and respect. Teachers may be able to fool noneducator parents, but they aren't about to fool me. Not only do I observe my children in their classrooms, but I also observe them in special areas.

My sons kept telling me all they did in Spanish was nothing or either watched videos. And the Spanish teacher had called me a few times, so I wanted to see what was going on. My children, who easily pick up content, didn't know much Spanish. That was also concerning. I showed up shortly after the class started one day. It was a hot mess. Kids were doing whatever they wanted. Sure enough, they were watching a movie. Once a kid pointed out I was in the back of the class, many students settled down. Then, the teacher circled back to check on me. I informed her I wasn't there to talk to her but to observe the class. Once she realized I was going to stay the entire class, she started searching through her computer to find a lesson to teach. Mind you, at this point, it was almost 15 minutes into class. She cut off the movie and had the students do yoga while she found materials. Then, she went over the alphabet, numbers, and some words. Students were clearly confused. One even inquired why they were not watching the movie. This is why you need to show up. Teachers could be calling you about your children when they have created an environment that is not conducive for learning. Or, like this teacher, they might not even be teaching much at all.

Last Friday, I showed up unannounced, like I did since my boys were in kindergarten. To my surprise, one of the front office secretaries told me there was a policy change, and parents have to arrange observations in advance. I live in Washington Township where we are under both a construction and operations referenda which means my taxes have continued to go up. If you are demanding more money out of my pocket to support the school, the least you could do is not make it a hassle for me to see what my money is supporting. The operations referendum goes toward supporting teacher salaries. I want to know if I'm getting my money's worth. I drove home and emailed my sons' teachers to get permission. One replied right away. I returned and sat in his class for 45 minutes. While I was there, my other son's teacher stopped in to tell me I could come to sit in her class too. I sat in my other son's class for about 35 minutes.

What do I do while I observe? I find a place in the room where I can sit on the perimeter but see the entire class. I also don't want to be next to my child. I read what is on the walls. I'm looking for student work and evidence of what they have learned. I look at the classroom library. Is it diverse? When I say diverse, I don't mean there are a few books with multicultural characters sprinkled in. I want to see diverse authors. I also want each genre diversified. Right now, my sons are studying the mystery genre. I looked to see if the books in the mystery section were diverse. I looked around for the agenda. What is my child learning today? Look for 'I can' statements such as, "I can use sentence variety in my writing." There should be an 'I can' statement or objective for each subject. Then, I looked at what other students were doing. Are there major discipline issues in the class. It is important to note the location of your child's desk. Is your child an island? This is a term used by teachers when they move your child's desk to an area of the room all alone. Watch how the teacher teaches and interacts with students. Last, observe how your child is working.

Just showing up and staying for an extended period of time puts your child's teacher on notice. Your actions make it clear that you are invested in your child's education. It also gives you a frame of reference when you speak to your child about his or her day. If you have concerns once you observe, don't interrupt the teacher right then. Write them down and schedule a meeting later.

We can't care so much when our children are babies and then blindly trust the adults whom we place in their care once they get older. Black children are not faring well in these schools. Black parents must hold schools accountable and make sure our tax dollars are being put to good use.