



My Education Birthday Wishes

August 30, 2021 by Educator Barnes

Parents carefully and quickly light the candles on the birthday cake. Family and friends squeeze in close and sing “Happy Birthday to You.” Then the birthday person is told, “Close your eyes. Make a wish and blow out the candles.”

This tradition has been around for decades. I don't know how many of those wishes came true or if there is birthday magic. If there is, I have a few wishes and hopes for education on my birthday. Don't worry. I know we are still in a pandemic so I'm not blowing on a birthday cake that will be consumed by others. Despite this tradition being modified, there still might be some of that birthday magic in the air.

Wish One: Learning during the pandemic improves.

This is the third academic year where the pandemic has impacted teaching and learning, and yet, some schools still seem like neophytes traversing new terrain. There is not a solid protocol for when a child is positive for COVID-19. Teachers are unclear or lack resources to support students who are quarantined and then return. Interventions to close learning gaps are still not in place. There is no excuse to have not at least improved from the 2019-2020 school year.

Wish Two: Parents work together to improve education for all students.

Public comment during school board meetings has been contentious and families in the same districts have become adversaries. Children are precious to their parents, and this is why they fight so hard for what they believe is right and what is best for their children. What is best for one family should not impede upon or harm other families. When I pushed back about the Famous Hoosier assignment my boys had last school year, I did not push back with the goal of supporting only Black children like my boys. I wanted the famous Hoosier list diversified to include more than predominantly white men because all children need to know there is greatness in Indiana from people of all backgrounds.

Wish Three: Teachers are supported and treated as true professionals.

Schools don't work great when teachers aren't treated well. The teacher shortage is having a huge impact on education. Several principals contacted me over the summer in hopes that I could help fill vacancies. Some of those principals started another school year not fully staffed. The reality is the poor working environment and administrators not seeking teachers out for their expertise during this pandemic pushed teachers out the door. Principals can't live in silos. They need to lean on their teachers as trusted professionals. When teachers are treated and uplifted as true professionals, they are more likely to stay throughout the school year and even return the following year.

There are so many wishes I could name, but those three are the ones that have weighed heavy on me lately. To those of you that sent me birthday wishes, thanks. If you really want to do something for my birthday, reach out to the school in your neighborhood and ask, "How can I help?"