



When Teachers are Criminalized at School

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Is there anywhere that Black people can be safe and not criminalized? This is a question that some Black educators have when at their school. Franklin Township teacher, Craig Jordan, experience brings this question to the forefront. Indy Recorder reported that Jordan, a Black male teacher, was handcuffed by school security after being accused of pretending to be a

staff member. After the athletic director verified Jordan's identity, he was released. I could relate to his experience.

Although I have never been handcuffed by school security, I have been accused, on multiple occasions, of not being a staff member. One time, I had decided to attend a parent/teacher organization (PTO) meeting. I had decided to attend after the principal had shared that parents were concerned about the lack of staff coming to the meeting.

On this particular day, the meeting was held outdoors. I stayed at school until the meeting. I exited the building and walked around to the other side of the building where the meeting was located. As I approached, I saw a few people whispering, and then one parent had started walking in my direction. Once we met, the parent said, "Can I help you? Are you looking for someone?" I replied, "I'm here for the meeting," and began walking only to have the parent emphasize that the meeting was for parents and staff only. I then said, "Yeah, I know. I work at the school." Then the parent looked at me quizzically and said, "Well I don't know you."

At this moment, so many thoughts went through my head.

1. *I don't even have to be here. I am missing spending time with my family, for what?*
2. *Lady, do you really think I have nothing better to do in my life than to crash a PTO meeting?*
3. *The meeting location was moved outdoors which was not the typical location, so how would I know?*
4. *I am wearing a suit. Doesn't this show I am a professional?*

Instead of sharing my internal monologue, I moved back my suit coat jacket, to show my staff ID. After that, the parent said, "It is hard to see." Then, another thought flashed through my mind.

You really think I have a fake ID made to crash this meeting?

Externally, I said, "no worries." I then unhooked my ID pouch from my belt loop to be examined by the parent. Once she deemed it authentic, I was permitted to walk over to the meeting.

I was the only staff member who attended, and that was my first and last PTO meeting that school year. I believe it is important to be aware of who is inside of our school buildings and

on school property, but there is a huge issue if Black educators are accosted at work and then not believed even when they are telling the truth.

Even though my husband is not an educator, he has experienced this extra scrutiny. One time, we attended an orchestra concert. I was chatting with students and their families and I heard my husband's voice. I turned around and he was explaining who he was to security. When I looked, he was the only Black man in the hallway. It was never made clear to either of us why he, out of everyone, was stopped and asked questions.

These situations take a toll on Black educators. Jordan shared with Indy Recorder that he was in therapy. A job should not put you in situations that cause people to feel uneasy, stressed, traumatized, or needing therapy. To retain Black educators in the profession, they can no longer be made to feel like criminals in their schools.