



A Look Back at My First Year as an Education Consultant

May 11, 2022 by Educator Barnes

If you would have told me when I graduated from Purdue University in May of 2006 that I would eventually leave the classroom and start my own education consulting business, I would have laughed in your face and laughed hard. On May 11, 2021, that is exactly what I did. I started the education consulting company [Blazing Brilliance](#). Being an entrepreneur is not for

the faint of heart nor is being an education consultant. In case you are on the fence about taking the leap or are just curious about this work, please read on to learn more.

On March 31, 2019, I took my first leap into entrepreneurship and started my own traditional publishing company. Yes, that means I do not charge to publish people's books. Take my advice and stay away from vanity publishers who charge. It is a scam.

I decided to start Brave Brothers Books because I wanted to fill the void of not having enough diverse books. Did you know there are more children's books with animals than there are children's book with Black people? So far, I have published five books: "My Family's Great Smoky Mountains Adventure," "Ghost Text," "Dear Curly Hair," "Querido Cabello Rizado" (Spanish version of DCH), & "Querido Cabello Rizado/Dear Curly Hair" (bilingual version of DCH). The first two books were written by my sons, which gave me the opportunity to perfect my entrepreneurial skills and publishing process. "Dear Curly Hair" was written by Melodee Barnes who is not related to me or my husband. Now, I have partnerships with other organizations, and "Dear Curly Hair" and "Querido Cabello Rizado" will both be on the Seesaw platform soon! More books are currently in production!

However, I was running my publishing company on the side in addition to doing a few education consulting jobs over the years. The second to last conversation I had with my dad before he died last year was about him pushing me to take the leap. It was no longer sustainable to work full time in a school, run a publishing company, and do consulting jobs on the side. If you are reading this, you know that I also write on a consistent basis. Something had to give, but I was scared.

If I have an off week at work or two, I'm still going to get paid every other week. Working for yourself means that you don't get to have off weeks. You have to consistently hit the mark or you will not get paid. I decided to take the leap so I could put more energy into both businesses. For example, I had begun talks with Seesaw while I was working full-time, but the process stalled partly because I had my focus divided into so many areas. The moment I stopped working in a school full-time was the moment I was able to nail down this opportunity.

So, how has the year been? Well, I'm glad you asked!

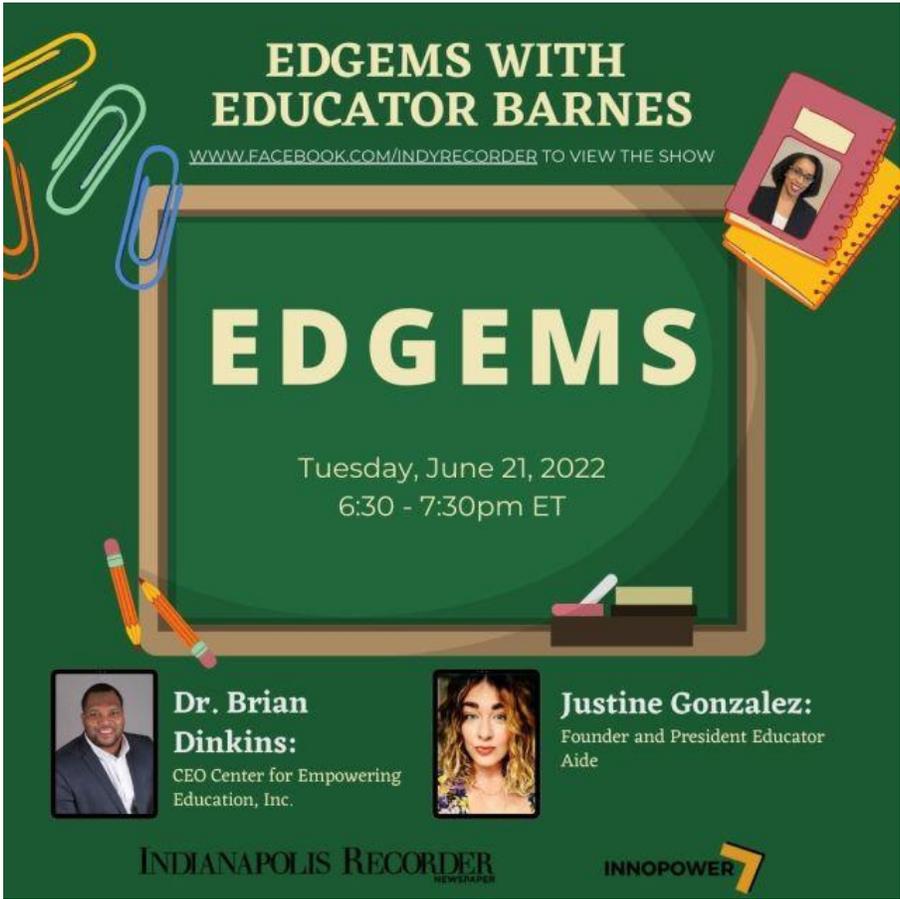
First, let me hit you with the stats.

I have worked with seven organizations and have completed at least one paid contract with each organization. With some organizations, I have had multiple contracts. Most importantly, I have renewed contracts with some or have recurring contracts with other organizations. I am also working on a couple more contracts as I type this piece!

Here is some advice ... in no particular order:

Speaking of contracts, I mean contracts. **Do not begin ANY work without a contract.** I do not care if it is your best friend since elementary school. If you are doing work for your best friend, have best friend sign on the dotted line. It makes terms clear for all parties involved.

Get yourself a mentor. I have two mentors, Justine Gonzalez of Educator Aide and Dr. Brian Dinkins of Center 4 Empowering. They are really awesome education consultants who have been teaching me the skills to have a sound education consulting business. Speaking of Dinkins and Gonzalez, they will be on EdGems, a show I moderate for the Indy Recorder, next month.



**EDGEMS WITH
EDUCATOR BARNES**
WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/INDYRECORDER TO VIEW THE SHOW

EDGEMS
Tuesday, June 21, 2022
6:30 - 7:30pm ET

 **Dr. Brian Dinkins:**
CEO Center for Empowering Education, Inc.

 **Justine Gonzalez:**
Founder and President Educator Aide

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Only say yes if it is your area of expertise. Currently, I focus on three main areas: professional development (PD), coaching and mentoring, and communication. My PD and coaching and mentoring centers around literacy, diversity, equity, inclusion, and access (DEIA), English language learners, culturally responsive teaching, and school culture. For communication, I help schools improve communication between parents and the school and the school and the community.

When a school asked me to do PD facilitation for special education, I declined. All educators are supposed to have knowledge about special education but all educators are not deep experts on the topic. Even though many of the supports that help English language learners (a field in which I have a master's degree) also help special education students, that is not my area of expertise. Obtaining more contracts allows my business to grow. Taking on a contract that I am not confident I can fulfill at the highest level can lead to me losing work or having difficulty obtaining more work.

Get federally trademarked and have a business website and email. Nothing says pop-up shop consultant than a person who does not have all the basics covered. Oh yes, this should go without saying: officially register your business and have an EIN from the IRS. The EIN is important for establishing a bank account, receiving payments, and documentation needed when tax time comes.

Last, **be a damn good educator and leader before you take this path.** I have been an English teacher, English as a new language teacher, a literacy coach at both the elementary and secondary setting, an elementary librarian, and a middle school academic dean. I also have taught college courses for almost a decade, and I currently supervise English as a new language student teachers. Every single skill I developed in these roles are used by me in my consulting work. If I can switch over to African American Vernacular English for a moment ... this work ain't for play play. IYKYK! You cannot fake it until you make it. Some of my opportunities I am currently negotiating involves me replacing a faker. Students lives and futures are in the balance, so do not step out if you can't deliver.

Now I am at the point of building a team because Shawnta Barnes is only one person. Year two will involve this goal. Although I never saw this possibility, I am glad I stepped out on faith. This has been the most rewarding yet exhausting year. I feel like my zest is back and shooting on all cylinders. I know I am walking in my purpose.

Yep, I am going to shamefully plug myself. My mentors say I could do that more!

If you want to connect about how Blazing Brilliance can serve your organization, email connect@blazing-brilliance.com.

If you are an author and are interested in submitting a manuscript for potential publication, email connect@bravebrothersbooks.com.

One more thought ... there is enough bread for everyone to eat so do not let anyone make you feel like there are no opportunities. There are. Just remember what I shared about my publishing company. I created it to help solve a problem. As long as you are offering solutions, the right organizations will connect with you!