



Black Excellence Should Not Be the Exception But the Rule

June 11, 2022 by Educator Barnes

In my family, we have focus words for the school year and academic goals.

Our words this year were: integrity and perseverance.

Our academic goals were:

- (1) No grade lower than a B in any academic classes
- (2) No grade lower than satisfactory in special areas classes
- (3) No conduct score lower than 3

Our sons exceeded our expectations during their last year of elementary school. In 5th grade, they earned ALL As for every single quarter in ALL academic subjects. For some quarters, some of their As were 100%. (Momma and Daddy, didn't even earn grades like this in elementary school) Additionally, they earned scores of satisfactory or outstanding in all special areas classes. They earned the highest conduct score, 5, for all quarters. Although this was not included in our goals, they passed all sections of ILEARN, continued their streak of high marks on both the math and reading sections of NWEA, and both earned the President's Education Award for Outstanding Academic Excellence.

MSD of Washington Twp

School Name: Crooked Creek Elementary Next Year Grade Level: _____ School Year: 2021-22
 Phone: (317) 259-5478 Grade: 05
 Student Name: Jeremiah J. Barnes Teacher: Anne Krueger

CONDUCT LEGEND

5*	Exemplary
4*	Good
3*	Acceptable
2*	Needs Improvement
1*	Unacceptable

	T1	T2	T3	T4
Class Grade				
5th grade CONDUCT	5*	5*	5*	5*

	T1	T2	T3	T4
Reading	A	A	A	A
Mathematics	A	A	A	A
Writing	A	A	A	A
Science	A	A	*	A
Soc St: USA - The Founding of the Republic	A	A	A	A

T4 Comments
 A Pleasure to have in class
 Hardworking, motivated student

**SPECIAL AREA CLASSES
GRADING LEGEND**

O	Outstanding
S	Satisfactory
N	Needs Improvement
U	Unsatisfactory
NA	Not Assessed
INC	Incomplete

Class: 900051 / 001 PHYSICAL EDUCATION-5		
Teacher: Azjah Woodson-Bass		
	S1	S2
Physical Education	S	S
S2 Comments		
Class: 870051 / 001 ART-5		
Teacher: Brooke Callis		
	S1	S2
ART	O	S
S2 Comments		
A Pleasure to have in class		
Class: 875051 / 001 MUSIC-5		
Teacher: Julie Snyder		
	S1	S2
MUSIC	O	S
S2 Comments		
A Pleasure to have in class		
Class: 600051 / 001 TECHNOLOGY-5		
Teacher: Allison Markus		
	S1	S2
Technology	S	S
S2 Comments		
A Pleasure to have in class Displays Effort		

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James Barnes and Jeremiah Barnes with their grandmother Patricia Barnes

If you would have asked me if this was possible when they started elementary school, I would have said anything is possible but even I did not see this happening.

Black excellence should not be shocking. Black excellence can no longer be seen as a mythical unicorn that only a few Black people can capture. All Black kids can learn. All Black kids should be receiving the supports they need to become at least proficient. We have no expectations for them to continue straight As; however, we expect them to be at least proficient in all skills in all subject areas. Proficiency is the bar, and it can be achieved by more Black students in Indiana than the low number that are currently showing proficiency.

This takes works from many stakeholders. This achievement by my children was possible because of a partnership between my husband and me and the school which includes people like the principal, social worker, support staff, and teachers. Other supports include community members, other parents, and last but not certainly least, the hard work of my children.

I could easily close off my life and watch my Black sons be successful and hope other kids get it, but I can't. The reason I spent three years on the IDOE Cultural Competency Advisory Council (I would still be on if had Dr. Jenner's administration had not gotten rid of it) and spent years working with other community members creating the [NAACP Black Academic Excellence Plan](#) is because the academic achievement of Black students in Indiana is unacceptable. Be clear: This plan is not a document that is sitting on the shelf. Actions are already being put into motion to make the plan a lived reality because **our Black kids can't wait.**

This is why I cannot be content. Even though I am proud of my sons, I am bothered that other Black students are not being pushed to excellence and that few people seem to care about the consistently low achievement of Black students in Indiana.

What bothers me more are the people who attempt to question suggestions I have continually made for years when I am advocating for Black children. What more evidence do I need to produce to suggest I just might know what I am talking about? My sons are successful academically, and I helped many students to grow academically. On average, when I was an English teacher, my students read 35 books independently measured in multiple ways and the minimum number of books read by all of my students was 10. The majority of those students were Black and some of my Black students said my English class was the first time they actually read an entire novel and didn't pretend to read one.

I am not the only Black educator or parent that knows what it takes, but people don't want to listen. They don't want to do the hard work. The reality is that admitting that Black achievement is an issue is also admitting that people failed Black kids. People are more concerned about being seen as a failure than learning from the mistakes that were made and doing what it takes.

My boys are starting middle school next school year which means we are half way through the K-12 education system. I would hope before they graduate in 2029 that outcomes for Black children in Indiana are better.

Black excellence is achievable by all Black students. If you are reading this, please advocate with me to put pressure where needed to ensure that Black students in Indiana get what they need to learn