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# 5 Ways to Make Black Lives Matter at School



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**by Shawnta S. Barnes**    

The societal turmoil, protests, and unrest—all a cry for justice. The focus is on Black lives; however, this goes beyond Black lives being protected from police brutality. Black lives must also be protected from educational malpractice.

For decades, researchers have shown there is an [achievement gap](#) between Black and white students. More recently, concerns have shifted to the [opportunity gap](#), which highlights the fact that Black students are not receiving access to the same opportunities as white students. Last, there is the [belief gap](#) when teachers don't believe a student has the capability of improving. The bottom line is all these gaps show the repeated and consistent educational malpractice toward Black children in school.

[pullquote]If educators really want to join in the fight for educational equity, they must help improve educational outcomes for Black students.[/pullquote] Here are some ways to ensure Black lives matter in schools.

- **Acknowledge that Black lives have not mattered in the school.** A problem can't be solved or addressed if there is no acknowledgment that it exists. Many schools across the country are just now having a conversation about race in the school. When these conversations happen, they must start with honesty. Name it. Say Black lives haven't mattered. Say that you have not cared that the Black students were not learning. Acknowledge that you gave up on Black students. Set yourself free with honesty.
- **Identify the inequities in the school.** Stating that Black lives haven't matter was the easy part. Next, school leaders and educators should examine issues in the school with Black students. Look at academic data for all subject areas. Review discipline data. Break the data down by the teacher. Determine how many texts are written by Black authors. Evaluate all curricula and determine how often Black students are seen in the curricula. Don't forget the electives. Are Black artists covered in art? Are Black bodies displayed in diagrams for health class? Evaluate programming. Who is in the gifted classes? Question and analyze everything!
- **Create an equity committee.** This must be a continual conversation. To ensure the conversation continues, there has to be some accountability. There have to be people committed to doing the work throughout the school year and for every school year in the future. This committee must have real power. If all the committee can do is make recommendations, and no recommendations become reality, then the committee is not serving a purpose.
- **Accept the school will change.** What I have noticed is that some school leaders are trying to maintain the status quo and then determine how to squeeze in changes. This is not how this should work. This may mean a curriculum has to be replaced, teachers trained on a continual basis in anti-racism, and accepting people will be upset. There will be push back but continue to push on.
- **This work is for everyone.** There are schools with no Black students. This does not excuse those schools from doing the work. These school leaders must ensure Black history is

covered throughout the year. The curriculum should be analyzed to ensure those students are seeing positive images of Black people and that there are Black authors included.

This work is not easy. This work is necessary. The changes start with each educator. Our Black students cannot afford for their needs to be ignored any longer. [\*\*Black students' lives must matter in every school.\*\*](#)

*This post originally appeared on [\*\*Indy K12.\*\*](#)*

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## Shawnta S. Barnes

Shawnta (Shawn-tay) S. Barnes, also known as Educator Barnes, is a married mother of identical twin boys. She navigates education from not only the educator's perspective but also the parent's perspective. She has been an educator for nearly two decades. Shawnta works with K-12 schools, universities, & education adjacent organizations through her education consulting business Blazing Brilliance. She is an adjunct college professor, supervises student teachers, Indy Kids Winning Editor-in-Chief, Brave Brothers Books Co-founder, & CEO, and Brazen Education Podcast host. She holds five education licenses: English/language arts 5-12, English to speakers of other

languages P-12, library/media P-12, reading P-12, and school administration P-12, and she has held a job in every licensed area. Previously, she has served as a school administrator, English teacher, English learners teacher, literacy coach, and librarian. She won the 2019 Indiana Black Expo Excellence in Education Journalism Award. In 2023, she completed her doctorate in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education with a minor in Learning Sciences. She is an urban gardener in her spare time and writes about her harvest-to-table journey at [gardenershicole.com](https://www.gardenershicole.com). To learn more about Shawnta, visit [educatorbarnes.com](https://www.educatorbarnes.com).

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