

8 Things That Make a Good School



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by Shawnta S. Barnes    

Educators have difficulty agreeing upon what makes a “[good school](#).” My thoughts about this topic have continued to change as I progressed through K-12, earned my bachelor’s degree, began teaching, returned to school to earn my master’s degree, and then became a parent

with children in school. Each of these experiences has shaped, changed, developed and further defined my ideas of a good school. I believe as my children continue to progress through the education system, my thoughts will continue to evolve. However, I also believe there should be some non-negotiables for all educators and parents.

1. **Teachers must believe [all students can learn](#).** If you are in my children's school and you don't believe they can learn, then goodbye. Don't let your classroom door hit you on the way out (well...maybe it should). You should not be an educator. Go find another profession, please!
2. **Students from all backgrounds who are racially, ethnically, linguistically or economically different are learning.** If a school is majority White, but the Black kids are failing, this is not a good school. Schools can earn an A or B rating if their population of students of color is small and failing. [That's not okay](#).
3. **Teachers must know their content well.** Some students are not learning because their teachers haven't learned. No, a first-year teacher will not be as good as a ten-year teacher, but we need more teachers knowledgeable in their content and not learning on the job.
4. **The school communicates with parents clearly and frequently about important issues and asks for input before making decisions.** The school serves the community. If major changes are happening or my children are behaving poorly, I expect a phone call, email—some form of communication. I shouldn't have to beg for information.
5. **The principal must support teachers and build teacher leaders.** A principal [cannot run a school alone](#), but many of them feel like they have to do so. They micromanage, lead with fear and refuse to delegate to others. This creates toxic environments and leads to a rotating cast of teachers in the school.
6. **Schools must be safe.** Teachers nor students should feel fear when they walk through the school doors. Too many schools are rampant with bullying from both teachers and students. Violent behavior is occurring, and there isn't a plan to curb the behavior.
7. **Schools need appropriate up-to-date resources.** Teachers should not have to purchase their entire curriculum from Teachers Pay Teachers because they don't have textbooks or the resources are decades old.
8. **Teachers should not be present any danger to the school community.** There are too many stories about teachers harming children, and yet, many of these teachers get

canned from one school and find employment at another. I not only want these teachers away from children, but I want their teaching license revoked.

These are my non-negotiables for schools. If a school doesn't meet these requirements, I have a hard time seeing it as a good school—even if the school has an A rating. However, there are also some additional requirements that I want for my children.

- **The school should have a diverse student and staff population.** This is not to say that my children can only learn in proximity to White children. I have no problem with all Black schools, but my husband and I didn't want our children to attend a mostly White school as we did. We were part of desegregation busing and experienced mostly White classrooms in elementary school. In middle and high school, it got a little better because some diverse families started moving into the district where we were bused. But when you live in a mostly Black neighborhood and are bused to a mostly White school, it is hard. Our sons' principal is Black and Asian. There are teachers from different backgrounds; there are not as many diverse teachers as we would want but there are some. Their classes are diverse. They have had Asian, Latino, Black and White classmates. Not only are they exposed to diverse children like themselves, but they are also exposed to children of color who are not Black.
- **The school should be close to our home.** When my husband and I were bused from Indianapolis Public Schools to the Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township, we were on the bus for at least 30 minutes riding past cornfields. Our boundary school is about a seven-minute drive from our house. The closeness of the school makes it easier to attend school events or to get to school during inclement weather.
- **Children should have off-campus experiences.** Learning should happen outside of the school walls. Students need to get out in the community and learn about their community. They need to travel to different places within the state, in other states and maybe even out of the country. They need hands-on experiences they could not have in the classroom.

At the end of the day, this is my list and it remains a work in progress. Every parent and educator should have a "good school" list. We cannot accept schools as good schools based solely on test scores and school building ratings; there is so much more to a good school. The school must fit the child and the goals of the family.

What's on your ["good school"](#) list?

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A version of this post originally appeared on Indy K12 as [What is a Good School?](#).

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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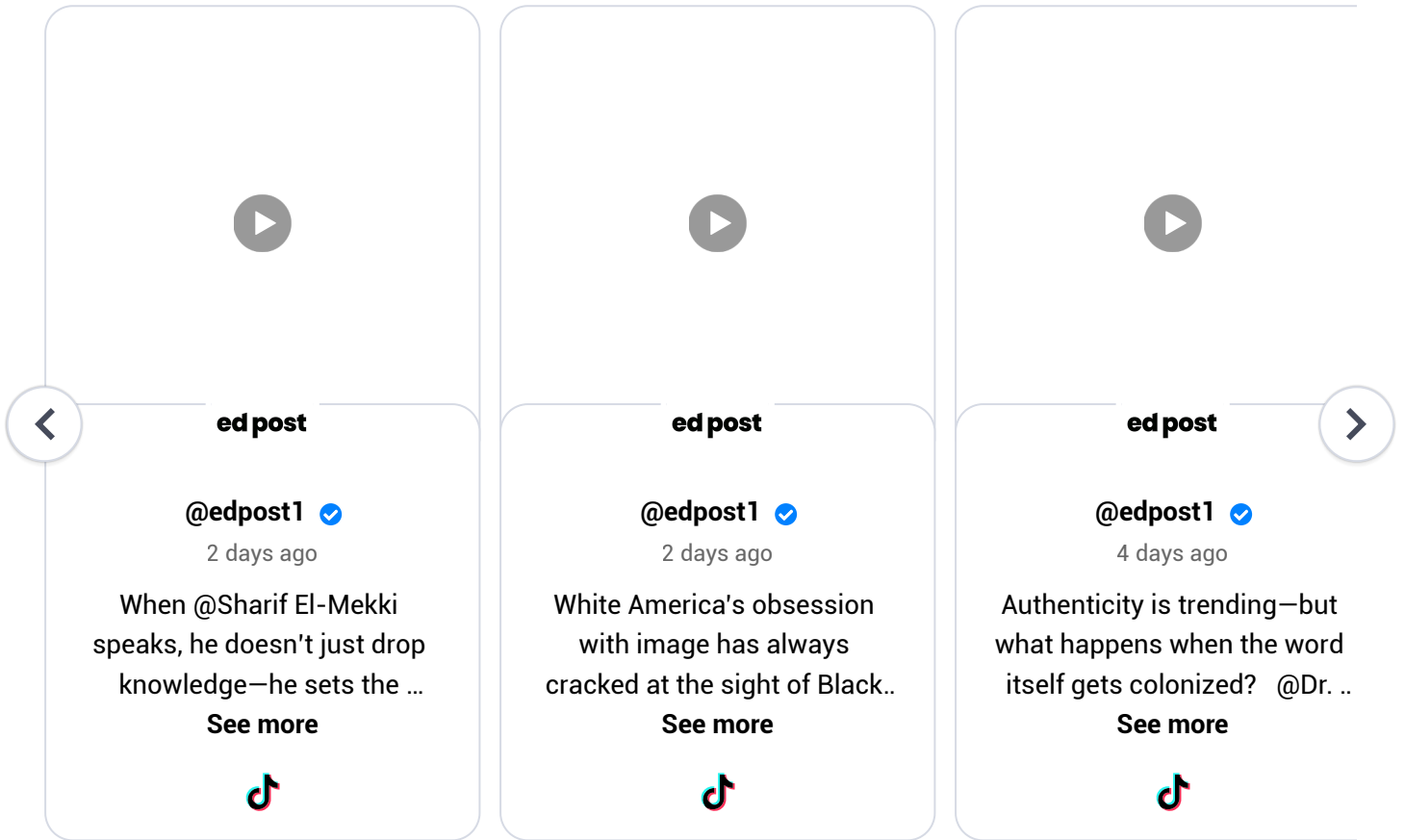
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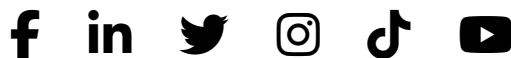
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