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Say Your Colleagues' Names Correctly



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by Shawnta S. Barnes



For years, I have [advocated for why it's essential to say students' names correctly](#). And while I spoke out for teachers to pronounce student names correctly, I was still fighting for people to say my name correctly.

Honestly, I shouldn't have been surprised. [If teachers didn't try to say or spell my name correctly as a child](#), why did I expect my colleagues to make that effort?

When I have addressed colleagues about repeatedly mispronouncing my name, some have called me rude. How am I rude when you keep calling me a name that isn't mine? If those teachers were offended when I called them out, I doubt they are trying to learn their students' names— [a critically important first step](#) for every teacher to earn their students' trust. I promise you, every person whose name is mispronounced prefers you [ask us how to say it correctly](#).

Currently, I am an education consultant. At one school, I asked a teacher how to say her name. Instead of giving me a direct answer, she told me two versions of her name and said she would answer both. Then, an administrator in the room interrupted and asked, "How does your family say your name at home?"

The teacher repeated only one of the two options.

Here's the thing. Some people had worked with this teacher for years and never learned how to say her name, and she just defaulted to being called whatever name they chose. That's not okay.

Other people should step up to be an ally, especially when it only takes a simple question to help.

Even though I get tired of telling people how to say my name and giving hints such as "Shawnta, long 'a' at the end" or "Shawnta, like in that [Ru Paul song](#)," I do it.

Sometimes, I don't even get to speak up before a colleague will jump in. When that happens, it gives me a sense of belonging when others feel it's important to pronounce and spell my name correctly. Learning the pronunciation of someone's name and using their [chosen name and pronouns](#) is a small but impactful gesture.

It may feel embarrassing to ask after months or years of saying a name incorrectly, but a moment of awkwardness is better than the alternative.

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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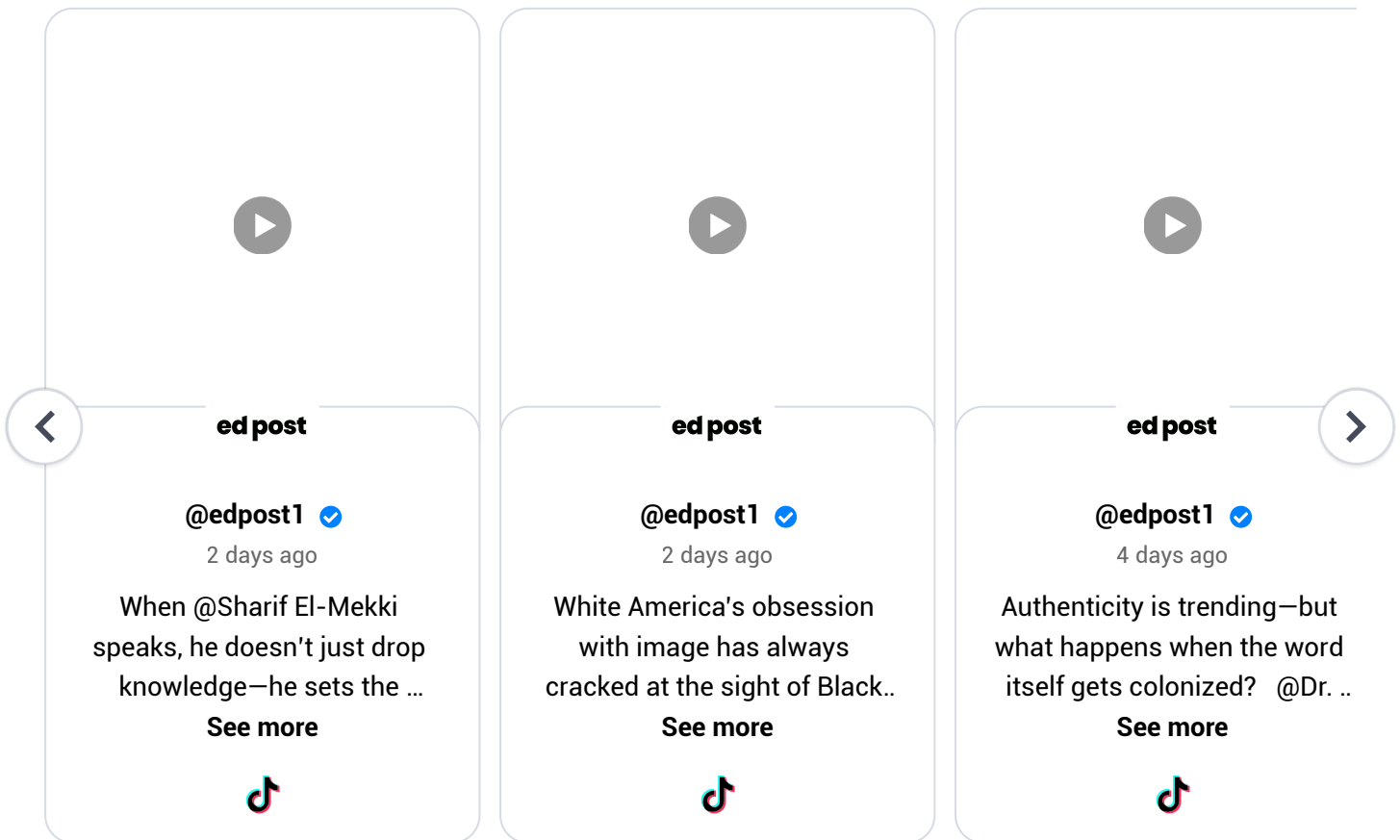
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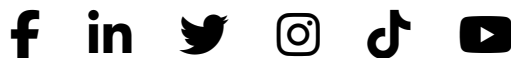
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