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This Teacher Instructed Students to Draw Black People Picking Cotton During Black History Month



Feb 16, 2022 2:12:00 PM

by Shawnta S. Barnes [f](#) [X](#) [in](#) [✉](#)

I attended Mary Evelyn Castle Elementary School, Craig Middle School, and graduated from Lawrence North High School (Go Wildcats!). These are all schools in the Metropolitan School District of Lawrence Township. As a graduate of the district, I keep up with what happens in the district, and I was disappointed to learn about an assignment that students received during Black History Month.

Lawrence Township confirmed that students at Fall Creek Valley Middle School were learning about life in both the northern and southern states in the 1800s. For part of an assignment, [pullquote]students were instructed to draw Black people picking cotton.[/pullquote]

According to a [WTHR report](#), one student was distressed to the point she felt the need to call her parents. Later in the report, a statement from the district was shared:

The MSD of Lawrence Township is committed to providing high quality instruction to all students. The assignment in question does not reflect that commitment and demonstrates poor judgement. School and district officials are involved and have communicated with both the teacher and the family who came forward with concerns.

[pullquote position="right"]Black history did not start with slavery, and it is about more than Black labor and Black oppression.[/pullquote] Yes, slavery is a travesty, a blight, and a stain in

American history, but all children need to know about Black experiences that do not center on slavery.

Sam Harris, a parent of a student at Fall Creek Valley Middle school, [tweeted](#) his disappointment about this incident:

As a parent of a Black FCV student I am angered and disappointed. This behavior has no place in our district (or any for that matter) Admin leave or suspension of the teacher is not suitable. The individual needs to longer have a place in our district!

<https://twitter.com/educatorbarnes/status/1493567904461299716>

Although Harris' son was not in the class where the assignment took place and his son is doing well at school, he wonders what else might be occurring that parents do not know about.

Luckily, some students recognized the problem with the assignment and refused to do it. What state standard requires students to draw enslaved Africans picking cotton?

Parental involvement is key, and parental communication with their children is key. When parents talk to their children about their school day, children are more likely to share with their parents when they believe something occurred that is not right.

It is 2022. At what point will the academic and emotional harm not occur in the classroom?

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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