

The Importance of HOPE

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The message I came to share with you today as you begin another school year; as you enter or return to your classrooms; as you sit in IEP meetings; as you perform assessments and share the results; as you praise and encourage; as you complete your paperwork and make reports to families – strive to preserve the HOPE that families have for their children.

HOPE is important in the lives of everyone – but especially of children with special needs and their families. One of the most important things to me and my family is the HOPE we have. I think HOPE impacts all families – it manifests itself in so many ways. It impacts a family's involvement in their child's education, in the life they provide for their child.

My daughter has Down syndrome. Her diagnosis carries with it many textbook conclusions and generalities that from a clinical perspective have to be factored into how she is educated. But in all honesty, that doesn't mean much to me. My husband and I have hopes for our daughter; for each of our three children – hopes that no one has the right to judge as being unrealistic or unattainable.

The importance of HOPE:

**HEAR, with
OPENNESS,
PASSION, and
EMPATHY**

I'm sure HOPE isn't something that many institutions of higher learning teach us to think about. It isn't something that can be measured nor is it something that any one can know exists for any particular family and to what extent.

The thing that my family and I work very hard to preserve is our HOPE. So many of the tough moments in our journey have been when something has come at us that had the potential of robbing us of our HOPE.

At the onset, the messenger of my daughter's diagnosis told us everything Lauren couldn't do or wouldn't do. We were told how short her life would be. We were told not to expect much. But I am here today as a testament to the fact that HOPE wins. My daughter is not like everything we were told. She is so much more.

My perspective is that having HOPE is rising above the limits of a disability diagnosis. Since we can never really know what a particular child is capable of doing, HOPE is what fuels the engine needed to maximize a child's potential.

Each of you here today is crucial in the lives of the children and families you serve. Each of you has a role in whether or not a family can continue to HOPE for the best for their child. You are important to families in that you can fuel families' hopes.

When you work to create partnerships with and empower families; when you ask them about their values, ideas, and decisions – ask them, “What are your hopes for your child?” I'm sure you will stump many with that question – because that is a question of the heart. That is a question whose answer reveals all of the fears that many parents have. That is the question that can define where a parent's level of involvement may fall. Whether a parent feels they can make a difference in their child's future or whether they feel powerless to circumstances that are beyond their control.

The importance of HOPE:

Hear parents.

Remain **O**pen to their views.

Use your **P**assion to motivate you.

Be **E**mpathetic to what families face.

HOPE lives. Seek to preserve it.

Thank you.