

You know she's going to college

Carol Tashie

The phone call came on a quiet May afternoon. It was from Heather, a parent whose daughter would be making the transition from middle to high school in the fall. They had just had their first meeting with the high school team and she was incensed. . "They want her to go into the functional skills classroom," Heather wailed. "How could they even suggest it - Ani has been fully included since preschool!!!"

This phone call was not unusual. Too often parents express disbelief and outrage that their children, after being in general education for years, faced the danger of segregation in their secondary school careers. And the school's reasoning is often the same. As Heather explained, "They tried to convince me that the special education classroom would give Ani the skills and experiences she needs to become a successful adult."

I spoke with Heather for some time. We discussed strategy and research and our personal experiences. And after a while we, inadvertently, came up with an innovative idea. As we talked, I mentioned how my parents always assumed I was going to "That's it!" exclaimed Heather. "It is the same way with my family. All the children in our family go to college - why would Ani be any exception?" And as we pondered this reality we came up with a plan. "Why don't I just tell the high school team what we have been talking about? That Ani will be going to college after high school and see what happens."

And so it began. Heather went to her next team meeting and casually dropped the "of course you know she'll be going to college" comment - and the world changed. Oh, not right away. As Heather put it, "first I watched their jaws drop to the ground." But as the concept of Ani going to college fed its way into their consciousness, the reality of what Ani's high school years should look like suddenly became clearer. If she was going to college, then she had to be in all general education classes. And college prep courses, at that. She had to be supported with high academic expectations. She had to have access to all school and extracurricular opportunities. She had to graduate with her classmates - and receive a diploma.

Ani has since graduated from high school (and yes, she did go to college!). Since then, families all around the country have been using the "of course you know she'll be going to college" line as a way of firmly establishing high expectations and endless possibilities in the minds of school teams. Like Ani's family, many first use the line at the transition-to-high school meeting, but more and more are using it at an even earlier age. These days it's not unusual to hear talk of college during preschool team meetings!

Does it always work? Of course not. Often it is countered with the "be realistic" argument. It is realistic to set your sights on a college education. So go ahead and give it a try. Maybe expectations of college will reduce recommendations of segregation in high school.



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