

Astronaut Food and CPR: How Students Found Their Path

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Speech Transcript

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First, I would like to thank you all for coming today. It has been great to spend the day with all of you. I have learned so much today, and I hope you have at least one take away too. This afternoon, I want to share some stories with you. The first story I would like to share with you is my own.

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Yes, the cutie with the blue hair ribbon and the curls is me at age 3. It's one of my mom's favorites from when I was little. The beautiful lady to the left of me in the bottom middle picture is my aunt Susan. My family isn't what I consider typical. I don't think most people get to grow up with their mom, grandma, aunt, and uncle. I don't think most people get to grow up living with someone who has an intellectual disability. Susan having Down Syndrome isn't something I saw as a disadvantage growing up. When I was little I thought Susan was really cool because she would sing The Lion King soundtrack with me when no one else would. It wouldn't be until I was older that I realized Susan hadn't been able to access all the opportunities others had.

So I grew up in a house with some different norms, and I am a better person because of it. I also grew up with my own differences from others. The difference between my aunt and I though is you can't see my differences. While Susan has physical traits which have been identified as being connected to a person with Down syndrome, I can go about my day and people have no clue about my medical condition unless I say something. I have an autoimmune disease. It's impacted my life since I was eight years old. Since autoimmune diseases can't be seen by people looking at you, most people have no clue I need supports in my life. When I go shopping, and I am having a high pain day, I'll use my handicap placard. The amount of times someone has told me I can't park there are too numerous to count. People have this belief that someone has to be completely unable to be independent in order to access handicap parking. Which is why when my husband is driving, we don't receive the same comments. Has anyone noticed the really cool computer mouse I use? I have had so much difficulty being able to convince previous employers that it's an accommodation I need even with a doctor's note, that I just went out and bought it. When I think about why transition portfolios are a great tool for all students, I think about those who like me

don't wear a sign saying what they struggle with. I believe transition portfolios are going to help students be able to explain who they are better which will make them better advocates for themselves.

Having an autoimmune disease has helped me build empathy and one of the reasons why I became a teacher. The other reason I became a teacher is to honor Susan. To make sure all people have access to high expectations. Another reason why I believe transition portfolios are going to help students is because in addition to being better advocates, it will also allow students to be able to better show off their strengths. Susan has some amazing talents which were underutilized while she was a working adult. I really want to give students every opportunity they can get to show off what makes them awesome.

Working in Virginia, I wrote transition plans, and we did some really great transition services and activities for students. I wish we had the transition portfolio as a tool for students to use. I reached out to my former students to see how they're doing now that they're no longer in school. Today, I would like to share two of their stories.

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My first student story is about Alisia. When Alisia was born, she was only 2 pounds! Her family was told she would have learning difficulties from the very beginning. I met Alisia her sophomore year of high school. Alisia's specific learning disability makes it difficult for her to read and comprehend information. This isn't stopping her from getting straight A's in college right now or pursuing her dream of becoming an astronaut. She is in her junior year of college, and is majoring in engineering. I wish I could show you the portfolio Alisia has. When I was teaching in Virginia, we didn't make it formalized. It's a shame because the academic skills she developed while in high school is why she was able to access the college program she's in. Her annual goals were focused on the technical components of reading informational text. Her IEP was focused on her goal of becoming an astronaut. Her mom was smart enough to keep all of the information we put together over the years, so Alisia and her know what her strengths and needs are. They know what process she needs to go through in order to obtain the education and training needed to become an astronaut. Alisia and her mom knew she needed supports in order for Alisia to be able to focus on her studies in college and were able to make sure she could attend school in a way where mom could be present to provide support. My next story doesn't have that same support system...

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Jordan has had a lot of things stacked against him. I met Jordan his freshman year of high school. When Jordan entered his junior year of high school, he began to make some really poor choices, and he ultimately dropped out of school. While Jordan hasn't earned his high school diploma, he is using skills he learned in high school to be competitively employed. Through his PE class he learned how to do CPR, and he has used these skills in order to become a CPR trainer. Jordan also hasn't given up on his goals of being a gymnast or a personal trainer. He posts videos on Instagram showing his skills and has an account specifically for this purpose. His Instagram account is his current portfolio! Imagine if he had had a teacher who had him collect artifacts along the way or parents who held onto things for him! He might have been able to get to where he is today a whole lot sooner. Which is why...

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We've introduced transition portfolios for all students with an IEP. Students have their own paths. Capturing those paths in order to assist them in living out their goals and dreams is what I believe is one of the coolest parts of working with transition aged students. I think it would be really cool to have a student give a presentation on why they want to be an astronaut, have someone record it, and later on in life be able to show the recording while hanging out in space. I want students to be aware of what their strengths and skills are. I want them to be able to confidently go into life as an adult and know they have tools which will help them be successful.

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Transition Portfolio Guidelines

Four Components

- Student Information
- Student Learning Characteristics
- Academic Skills
- Employability Skills

Portfolios are being created digitally

- Indiana Career Explorer
- Google Sites Template

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Be sure to save the link to your computer because this document is being updated! Since it was originally created as a Google Doc, it can be updated without having to repost it to the DOE website. Future updates include How To Videos, additional example links, and more.

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Training Opportunities

- Ft. Wayne - July 22
- South Bend- July 30
- Washington- July 31
- Fishers- August 1
- Seymour- August 2
- Greenwood- August 6

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Questions Slide

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