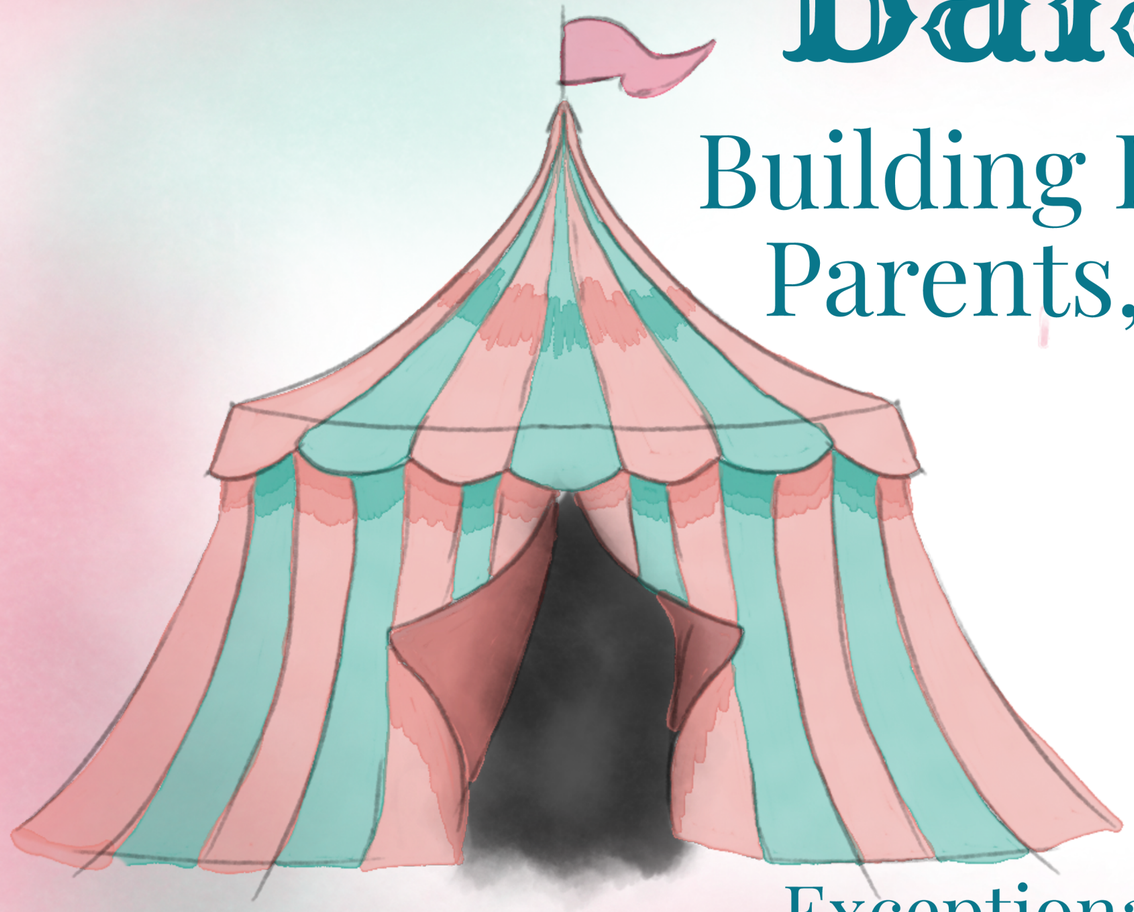


Balancing Acts:

Building Relationships, Empowering Parents, and Expanding Advocacy Beyond the IEP

Presented By:

Mitzi Norton

Exceptional Education Department Co-Chair
LaGrange High School

Hi Friends! I'm Mitzi!

Before I share what I do...

I want to share **who I am**.

I'm a Mom.







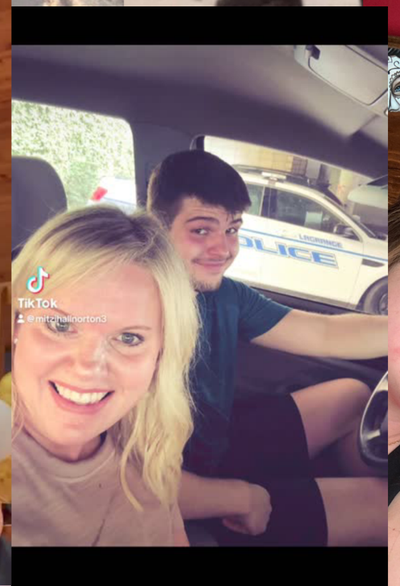
















I'm a Daughter.



















I'm a Granddaughter.

















I'm a Sister.

















I'm a Fur-Baby Mama.













I'm an Aunt to 13.

















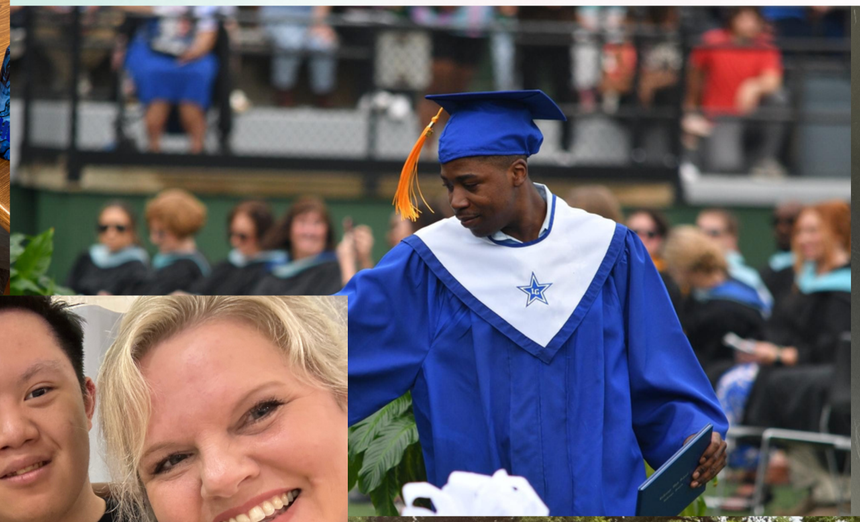






I'm a Teacher.


FEELING OVERWHELMED ?
Class Jobs






OUTTA


BALL
STRIKE
OUT
GUEST
TIME
INNING
HOME

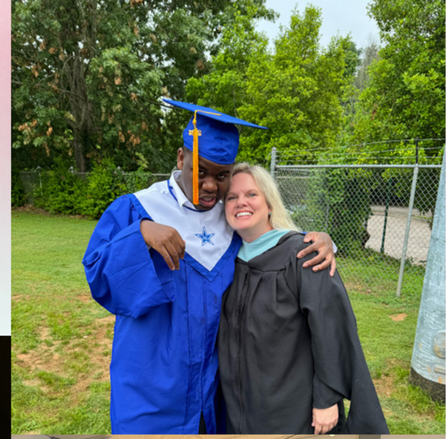













GEORGIA
LAGRANGE



I'm a Teammate.





















I'm a Cheer Coach.



















Department Chair Responsibilities

Mentor
Club Supervisor
Advocate
Problem Solver
Data Analyst
Curriculum Designer
Behavior Coach
Communicator
Collaborator
Counselor
Mediator
Record Keeper
IEP Support
Family Liaison
Encourager

The Real Truth...

I’m exhausted.

Not because I don’t care–

but because I do.

The Reality of Our Work



Purpose & Passion

Making Connection and Belonging Visible

1. Be Present, Not Just Available

2. Honor Every Story

3. Create Shared Ownership

4. Celebrate Progress, Not Perfection

5. Lead with Heart

Special Night—Where Belonging Becomes Visible.



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52


CALLAWAY
52




20


CHS
CHS
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PHOTOGRAPHY














Belonging in Action.















What Special Night Taught Us

Special Night proved something simple —

Belonging isn’t complicated; it’s intentional.
It isn’t earned — it’s offered.

People change when the environment changes.
Inclusion isn’t a program — it’s a posture.

And if we can design belonging once,
we can design it always.

What If....Just What If

What if the gap isn’t ability — but expectation?

What if the barrier isn’t the student or the parents — but the system?

What if inclusion isn’t an event — but a culture we choose?

Systems Don't Create Belonging... People Do.

- Compliance makes it lawful.
- Connection makes it meaningful.
- But lasting change happens when families become partners, not participants on the sidelines

That's where belonging — and progress — become visible.

The 3 Ropes That Anchor us



Mindshift: Rewriting the System

Discuss: What would it take to make this shift real in your school — not theory, but practice?"

What would “shared spaces” look like on your campus?

What policy or mindset keeps belonging from being automatic?

Where does your team still operate in “compliance mode” instead of connection?

The Mindshift of Meaningful Partnership

From paperwork ↠ purpose

From compliance ↠ collaboration

From meetings ↠ meaningful conversations

From checklists ↠ connections

From parent involvement ↠ family partnership

From placement ↠ belonging

From data ↠ understanding

From information shared ↠ voices heard

From “for families” ↠ “with families”

From trust ↠ advocacy

5 Phrases That Change the Table

Use these in emails, meetings, or hard conversations:



The Work Is Heavy, But It Is Holy

We don’t just fill out forms.
We build futures.

We don’t just hold data.
We hold someone’s whole child.

Every time we choose connection
over compliance alone –
we change more than a meeting.

Your Turn!!

What is one shift you will take back to your school, team, or table?

Write it

Speak it

Live it

In Closing-Remember!

Change starts small—with a mindset,
a moment, and a choice to do things
differently.

Thank You!!

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