

My name is [REDACTED]. I am [REDACTED] years old and am from [REDACTED]. Thank you for letting me come to speak today. I am graduating from [REDACTED]. Tomorrow I start my first paid job at [REDACTED]. I fill the cooler, dust the front end stands, and I fill my bay. I will help unload the truck when it comes in.

At every ARD meeting, I told people that I want to drive the fork lift at Home Depot or Lowes. Since I was little – I have always loved fire trucks. I also want to work at the [REDACTED]. Where am I now? – [REDACTED]. That is OK – I will get some experience. It is very important for kids with disabilities to have paid jobs BEFORE they graduate so that they learn how to work and how to keep a job.

Preparing kids with disabilities for their future is important for schools and parents to do. It starts when kids enter school – every ARD meeting leads to the future. My parents knew a good education would help me get a job and let me live where I want to.....just like everyone else.

My mom and dad have helped me a lot over the years in trying to reach my dream. Now we are talking about buying an old fire truck and fixing it up so that I can use it for kids fire truck parties. I also love music so I can take my ipods and let the kids dance. I also have lots of instruments so I could have an instrument petting zoo like the Houston Symphony. I could call it the Fire House Five band!

I have had a lot of teachers over the years that have helped me too. They taught me how to read, how to talk, how to work with others, how to write with a pen or pencil, how to do math. At home, my mom worked with me too. Teachers and parents need to work together, but they also need to listen to the interests of kids with disabilities. Otherwise, we might all end up working at Walgreens...or Goodwill.....whether we want to or not.

Transition to life after school is very important and you need to remember that when you discuss changing anything about education. As you get new bills – ask yourself - is it going to help the future for ALL kids with disabilities by improving their education, helping them get a job or live independently – if not, then maybe the bill is not worth it. That is what we used in making decisions at ARD meetings.... Maybe you can use that idea too. Thank you very much.