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A Very Special Educational Journey

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A Very Special Educational Journey



Parents routinely look to experts from time to time for help in raising their children. But anyone raising a special needs child relies even more strongly on professional guidance that can help their child live his or her best life.

[Patricia Robey](#), Division Chair of [Psychology and Counseling](#) at [Governors State University](#), was a stay-at-home mother without a college degree when she gave birth to her fourth child, Brian, who had a genetic disability.

“As a parent, this is not what you’re anticipating,” Robey said. “You start reaching out to make sure your child gets the best possible services.”

Through her local public school district, she found resources including physical, occupational and speech therapy. Like other parents of special needs children, she found herself collaborating with professionals. Among them was a social worker at her son’s daycare program, who ran a support group for mothers. “It was a huge help,” she said. “It also inspired me to volunteer for a social service agency, and ultimately that led me to getting my doctorate.”

On her way to her doctorate in Counselor Education and Supervision, Robey earned three degrees at GSU (a BA in [psychology](#), an MA in communications studies and an MA in [counseling](#)) and has spent years on the faculty as well as continuing to raise her son, who is now in his late 30s.

They recently spent some time with the book [Here, You Are the Future!](#) created by [College of Education](#) and featuring children from GSU’s [Family Development Center](#). Prompted by Brian’s interest, Robey found herself slipping into her role as a teacher. “I

asked him, ‘Why do you think that boy is holding that bone? What is he wearing? What do you think he wants to be when he grows up?’ It turned into a conversation and became a real educational tool,” she said.



“The book is beautifully written and produced,” said Robey. “It was meant as a promotion for GSU and the College of Education, and to highlight the Family Development Center, but it is really more meaningful than just that. As Brian and I were reading and talking about what he was observing in the stories, I realized that it really reflects the mission and values of GSU. The children represented the diversity of our community and of our students, administration, staff, and faculty. I appreciate how the theme of “Here, You are the Future!” was evident in the presentation of career opportunities. At GSU, children’s career dreams can be fulfilled through our programs at the University when they are adults.”

One of those career opportunities is teaching. Robey has seen firsthand the lifelong value her son has received from all the special education professionals who helped him — and her — in his earliest years.

GSU’s [College of Education](#) (COE) has just added a [Master of Arts in Multicategorical Special Education](#) program this fall, and the first students are enrolled. Robey applauds the university for expanding education in this area.

“It’s so important that people in the educational system were open to conversations so we could work together,” she said. “Parents need to be encouraged, because sometimes you don’t know what to ask. And a lot of people don’t have the time, energy

or resources to be involved, so we rely on educators and the entire team at the school to fill the gap.”

The COE has also added a [Master of Arts in Early Childhood Education](#) degree this fall, and plans are underway to offer two more programs, one in Leadership in Teaching, and the other a Master of Arts in Teaching.

“These programs are very much needed during this time of teacher shortage,” said [Dr. Joi Patterson](#), Director of Educator Preparation and Licensure Advisor.

“We have several partnerships with Early Childhood programs. More than 50 percent of early childhood teachers are not licensed. Preparing licensed teachers will increase the quality of education for the student and the pay and retention rates for teachers,” she said.

The programs were approved in June, and early information sessions drew up to 30 qualified participants. “We were able to do limited community outreach and marketing over the summer,” Patterson said, “but we anticipate having a dozen students enrolled in each program for the fall.”