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Cohort 6
Program Synthesis

On every birthday, as a little girl, I blew out the candles on my cake and wished for a horse. It was the only wish I ever had; I wanted a horse. Year after year, the same wish, I wanted a horse. It took me 31 years to figure out that wishes don't come true by blowing out candles or even wishing on a star. Wishes can only come true by making it happen. So nineteen years ago, I began taking riding lessons. As soon as I made that decision, my focus was learning everything I could about horses. I was very passionate and in love with gathering any information and experiencing everything I could in this new world of horses. I bought every book I could find. I bought the latest books. I bought books on grooming. I bought books on riding. I even bought books not being published anymore at the antiquarian store. I watched people ride and asked a lot of questions. I went to horse shows. I couldn't get enough information on horses and the equestrian world. Eventually, I saved my money and bought a horse. I loved every minute of my pursuit to become a knowledgeable and accomplished equestrian. I made the decision and never looked back.

Pursuing this doctoral degree in educational leadership parallels my passion to become an equestrian. Getting the best education in the best schools has been part of my upbringing. There was never any doubt that anyone in my family would do anything other than to go to college. Teaching was the only career I ever considered. I majored in education and never switched majors. I graduated in 1980. Jobs in education were scarce and I needed a job to pay for education loans. I began working in the "business world" and became very successful. I made a lot of money but I did not feel fulfilled. I went back to college and received a Master of Science in Reading and Special Education in 1993. Shortly after that, I began teaching as a Special Education teacher. I taught in a self-contained classroom. I had the toughest and meanest kids in the school. I showed up the first day of class with a yellow dress that looked like something Jacqueline Kennedy would wear. That was the wrong choice and I quickly adapted to a more sensible wardrobe that didn't make the students think I was unreachable. It seemed that as long as these kids weren't in the hall and they weren't starting trouble, I was doing a good job. But that wasn't good enough for me. I taught the kids every subject: math, English, social studies, science and even physical education. I taught in that program for 7 years and every single student in that program graduated high school. I always say that being a special education makes you the best teacher you can be because you have to teach to several different levels and abilities. You always have to get the students interested and motivated. You have to make sure they can read and understand what they are reading so they can be successful in life after they graduate.

As I continue my career in education, I continually long for more knowledge and to be a part of the solution. My education at St. John's University has been both rewarding and challenging. The cohort model helped to motivate me to carry-on even when I was tired from a long week of work. I knew that everyone else was going to be there and that I was part of a program. I couldn't disappoint them or myself so I always showed-up unless I was physically unable to attend. There was no way that I wouldn't show-up. The cohort model gives you the opportunity to work with other people who are in leadership roles, gain knowledge and make connections. We leaned on each other and learned from each other and from our professors. The coursework

and group projects helped to prepare us for our final challenge of writing a dissertation. The professors exposed us to literature, renowned theorists and experts in the field of education.

A year has gone by since our last class and I have had time to reflect on my experience in this program. As a result of my involvement in this program the most important thing that I have learned is to be a critical reader and listener. To the layperson, it may seem like a lot of money and time spent on figuring out how to be a better reader and listener. My experience in this program has taught me how to navigate life and decisions at every level of my life. This program has opened my eyes to a new way of thinking and an even wider view of life - so many things to consider and to question.

I learned how to do research in a both a qualitative and quantitative method. Research teaches us predictability. We use research to make the best decisions as leaders in education and hopefully in life. I feel equipped to use this knowledge as I prepare to write my dissertation. I'm very grateful to my professors for their passion to educate others in the areas of their expertise. It was evident that they are some of the best in the field of education.

This new level of awareness cannot exclude what Albert Einstein once said regarding things that matter - "Not everything that counts can be counted and not everything that can be counted counts." This is part of the wonder and beauty of life. I remember when I took a guided rafting tour down the Snake River in Wyoming. I was in awe of the beauty and wonder of nature all around me as I floated down the winding river. The tour guide pointed out a Bald Eagles nest with the baby eaglets still in the nest. He told us how this majestic bird with a wingspan of 6 to 8 feet builds the nest for their young out of several different layers. Each layer is edible except the very bottom layer, which is made of wood and stones. When the parents stop supplying the young with food, the eaglets have grown and are ready to leave the nest. The baby birds continue to use the nest as a source of food. This can last them for several weeks until they reach the very bottom layer made of wood and stones. At this point, they must leave the nest and fly. Scientists learned all this through research. Every stage of the eaglet's development has been researched, named and is predictable. All of this information is important and valuable but it can never fully explain the wonder and beauty of that graceful bird as it soars through the clouds. As you watch it fly, you can't explain it and no words can describe it but you know you are seeing something very wonderful. I realize that we can't be closed minded, limit or exclude the fullness of children in education either. Like the soaring Eagle, a child is a wonder and beauty and has the ability to far exceed what we have proven.

Onward an upward.

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**Bald Eagle Keeping
Watch Over Eaglet**