***The Heart of the Matter***

**Part Two**

Honoring the stories of families is key to student success. Listen to the following story:

When my son was diagnosed with depression, anxiety and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, I remember the unspoken accusation and implied responsibility that came with the diagnoses and that hung, almost visibly, in the air before settling across my shoulders like a mantle of lead. No one thought to ask the questions, “Do you have other children and how are they? What do you think we should do? What is your son really good at? What are some of the things you do to support your child emotionally? How can we work together? Instead, [the therapist] recommended parenting classes and asked what other family “problems” existed. I was not consulted about the area in which I possessed the greatest expertise – my own child. On that day, I became the origin or the problem, not the knowledgeable collaborator.

A family story is a shared learning experience. It requires a Teller and a Listener, a very safe environment, and an understanding that each teller relates his or her story as it is remembered, either positively or negatively. Stories are not just statements of fact; they convey the teller’s perspective, expectations, skills, judgments, and feelings. Stories transmit all kinds of knowledge, when the listener has the capacity to hear themes and translates the themes into supports and services. Listening to the family story requires respecting the story as the story that teaches its listeners about the core capabilities and strengths of each family.

- Excerpted from Dixie Jordan in Everything is Normal Until Proven Otherwise

Families that share their stories allow service providers to help build upon their desired outcomes for their children.

Think about the family/families of the children you identified.

What is their story? How can you make it safe for them to share it?

What are they proud of in their child? What do they think their child is really good at?

How can you find out these answers if you don’t know?