

# The SRI Homeroom – Episode 11

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Welcome to the SRI homeroom. Today, how can we leverage research and technology to support students with disabilities?

**Adrienne Woods:**

If we are able to remove those barriers, and we're able to allow children to be successful, I think the definition of success for children with disabilities in particular would change a lot.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Improving outcomes and reducing barriers for all students. Today on the SRI homeroom. Welcome in. Hello, and welcome to the SRI Homeroom. My name is Kori Hamilton Biagas, and I am your host. Today, I have the esteemed Adrienne Woods with me. She looks to better identify points of intervention along the K-12 continuum that can be used to advance educational and societal opportunities for children with disabilities. Let's talk about it. Welcome, Adrienne.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Thank you for having me.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

It's such a pleasure to have you here with us. So in our description, we talked about the breadth of your work, which sounds like you're really trying to change the world for children with disabilities.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah, in a nutshell.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

In a nutshell, yeah. And I think that that's great because kids need support, and they need people thinking on their behalf like that. And so, what is the large problem you're trying to solve? Aside from being a world changing, world renowned researcher who's coming up with innovative solutions for kids with disabilities in K through 12. Let's get a little bit more granular and think about what's the ... What are you working toward in more practical terms? What are you working to solve?

**Adrienne Woods:**

So I'm going to start a bit more at the beginning to kind of frame why I have these goals, because I think-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

I love it.

**Adrienne Woods:**

If I tell people what I do. I do longitudinal secondary data analysis. So I am really trying to identify patterns, and systems, and trying to identify educational policies, or areas where we can make a difference, where we can help students with disabilities, and students receiving special education services.

And that, to me, sounds kind of dry. So the reason why I'm doing this, and why I'm doing it the way I am is because my brother went through this special education system. Shout out to Al. And he just had a very different experience than I did. And he is a brilliant individual. He's a computer programmer, and he speaks the language of software and coding. And I also like to code. And so I use the term code very, very loosely. And it is a language, and it's difficult. And he has always just gotten it intuitively. And he's a really smart guy. But he had a very different experience in school than I did. And that was growing up with him and witnessing this and being like, "But he's so smart. How is this so different?"

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

"I don't it?"

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah. So that kind of started my interest in special education, and as I started researching this when I was in grad school-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

How old were you when you started to notice?

**Adrienne Woods:**

I mean, he's three years younger than me, so pretty much my whole life. He has a neuroatypicality. And that is something that was ... It's like, you know when you grow up with a sibling that's like apparent, but it's also not apparent because that's just your brother.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Exactly. Right. Yes.

**Adrienne Woods:**

But yeah, our brains work differently, and a lot of people's brains work differently. I think the more we enter the current climate that we're in, the more we're realizing that not everyone thinks the same, and not everyone works the same. And that's perfectly fine. And in fact, that contributes to our society in a lot of really important ways.

So why are we kind of expecting that they all learn the same? So that's always something that was in the back of my mind. And when I was in college, I started getting really interested in it. And then, I went to grad school at the University of Michigan, go blue. And I started trying to figure out where do I even start on this problem? Because like you said, it is ... Improving special education is such a broad statement. And you could do this in so many different ways, and for so many different types of students. And people were always asking-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yeah, and at so many different levels you can think about doing it. Yeah.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah, and they were like, "Well, which students with disabilities do you want to focus on?" And I was like, "Well, all of them." Because really what I want to do is affect the system. And so, I realized that I kind of had to zoom out my lens. And rather than look at one problem, for one group, in one location, I wanted to look at the landscape and try and understand how did these problems ... How are they the same? How are they different? How are opportunities the same? How are they different? How does this

depend on context? How does it depend on disability? How does it depend on the subtype of disability, or the particular needs that a child might have?

And what can we do and when to really affect change for those students, and for their families, and for the teachers who are working with them. So I think my main focus right now is trying to understand how special education works, how well it works, and for whom. And then once we have a better understanding of the answers to those questions, we can actually affect change and we can kind of zoom back in to more granular level and work where it's needed.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And so what have you learned so far? Or what rises to the top as some of the most poignant learnings? You asked some really good questions. It's like, how does special ed work, for whom? How is it not working? So what are some of the things that in this time you've kind of begun to see? What are some of the patterns that have been emerging over time for you?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Well, I think the first thing that comes to mind is that when people have tried to answer this question in the past, first of all, special education, causal effects of special ed are really, really hard to estimate. Because when we're trying to figure out whether or not something works, whether it's effective, we need to design particular studies that can really isolate that from other factors that may or may not have an effect. Typically, when researchers do this, they'll design some sort of experiment where they'll randomly put children in a treatment group or in a control group, and then they'll manipulate one thing to see how much of an effect that has on student outcomes, let's say.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yes.

**Adrienne Woods:**

We can't do that with special ed, because we can't randomly assign a child who has a disability to receive or not receive special education. They're legally entitled to receive free and appropriate education in an environment that is most appropriate to them.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And it's restrictive.

**Adrienne Woods:**

So it's really tricky to actually estimate how well special education works or does not work. And there's a lot of really fancy methods that people have developed over the years to study this. This is partly why I started learning methods, and can call myself a methodologist, and do these data analyses with these large data sets. Because we just have to get really creative in how we study this.

And what I have found is when people have done this work, and they have tried to answer the question, how effective is special ed? They kind of do it for all special education. So they'll pull out some sort of estimate or conclusion about how effective special is, or how not effective special ed is from all of K-12. Or K through eight. And what I'm learning is that there's a pretty clear tenet in most of education, that the earlier you can intervene, the better. You want to get your foot in the door early, and sort of remediate anything that's needing to be addressed, and head off-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And we see that literacy, and mathematics, and all the core curriculum things, yeah.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Everywhere. And so, that is true of special ed too. And it's tricky because you have to identify the child as not only having a disability, but what is the disability, and what are their educational needs, and how do you best address those? But what we're seeing is that the actual effectiveness of special ed really depends on when it's delivered, which seems like it should be kind of a foregone conclusion. But it's not something that I think has been demonstrated very well yet in the literature.

And part of that is because it's so hard to do, it's so hard to design the right studies that are actually going to isolate that, and not have it be attributed to something else. Like the context in which a child lives, or the tutoring that a child might have received outside of school, or how involved the child's parents are. We're talking about special ed as a system, and there are so many factors that influence that.

And so, how do we figure out, overall, for different types of students, for different types of disabilities, is special ed working? And where can we improve it to make sure that it is working, and that all these students have the same opportunity to learn and to benefit from their education? So that's kind of what I've learned so far. It's more of a ... Learning these things kind of opens a door to-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

New set of ...

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah, new research questions, new directions to go. But that's kind of the main thing that I've realized and that I've been focusing on, is we have to get more creative and get more granular about when we're evaluating how effective special education is.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Wow, that's like ... I don't know how old you are, but that feels like life's work already, right?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yes.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

People talk about their capstone or their life's work, and you're probably in the middle of your career. And because of the origin of the passion for this work, you've been doing this your whole life already. And so, that makes me feel really excited to see where you can take this because the depth in which you've been studying this, and focus on this, and prioritizing this extends long beyond your professional career.

And so, that I think is really exciting because your why is so clear, and I think when we're conducting research, and when we're trying to change systems, having a very clear why and not losing focus on that why is absolutely essential. Even though it'll keep opening doors, and creating new questions, and take you down different roads. Your why is crystal clear, and I really appreciate that.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Well, thank you. I actually have ... When I was interviewing for grad school, I wrote my career goals on sticky notes while I was on a plane. And I was basically like, "No matter what I do, I want to come back

to this. Am I figuring out how to improve education for children with disabilities regardless of what their disability is? And is what I'm doing really making a difference?"

Because one of the things that drew me to SRI was the need to really see more of an impact of my work. When I do this research, when you write papers, when you present, you can make an impact in the field, but I want to make an impact in practice. And not just in sort of the theoretical knowledge of how special education should work. I want to actually change it. I want to actually change how special education works. And so, you talked about there's a whole career to be had here. And one of my, I guess, big hairy audacious career goals ... Because I'm a little bit of a data nerd. I want to make the data that we have available to ask and answer these questions, I want to make it better. And I think this is a problem that I've talked to leaders at the national federal level, who have said ... They ask a question, the leader of the National Center for Education Statistics, "What do we need to do better? What do we need?"

And the answer is, in all of education was, "We need better special ed data." We don't have the right kind of data to be asking and answering these questions about how special ed works, how well it works, how well it doesn't work, for whom it works, in what context it works. We need data to answer those questions. And so, I think I would love to be at the forefront of compiling that data, and making it usable, and making it accessible for folks. And not just me. I would love for this to be ... It's a group effort. There's a lot of other research out there whoa are brilliant and passionate, and have their own why and could do really cool things if they had access to the right data. So that's definitely one of my career goals is to make this ... Open this up to as many people as possible to keep pushing this work forward.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And so, you mentioned that one of the things that attracted you to SRI was the impact. The ability to have more tangible impact in your work. And so, what are some of the things that you're working on at SRI that are helping you to get a taste of that impact, that are getting you closer to seeing how all of this lifelong thinking is affecting children and families?

**Adrienne Woods:**

So there's one that's been on my mind. It's a project that I'm relatively newer to, and it's a bit of a stretch for me, to be honest. It's not like anything that I've ever done before. And it's not really anything that most people in education have done before. I'm a part of the LEARN Network, which is the-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Which is an acronym.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Capital LEARN, which stands for Leveraging Evidence to Accelerate Recovery Nationwide.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right, yes. What we're really trying to do is accelerate learning. This started for groups of students during the pandemic to accelerate their learning back to grade level. And it's kind of become a little bit more broad than that, because we recognize there are groups of students who have not been on grade level, who have been behind, and who need to accelerate their learning for a very long time, both before and after the pandemic.

Students with Disabilities are one of those groups, and a lot of the research has been like, how do we close the gap between students with and without disabilities? So one of the problems, the main problem that the LEARN Network is trying to help solve is to figure out how we can increase adoption of evidence-based products, and scale them. And what we mean by scaling is how are we making sure that these innovations that researchers have developed that we know are effective, that we know use evidence, that we know work, how do we make sure those products are actually reaching the students, and the teachers, and the families who most need them, right?

Because oftentimes as educators, or as researchers, we're trained to come up with this really cool idea, get really creative, solve a problem, identify a gap in the field. And we do it, and we develop an intervention, or a new way of thinking, or a theory and it works. And then what do we do? And that's sort of where the LEARN Network is stepping in. We're trying to see how can we help a product team ... And again, I use the word product very loosely because education is a really unique field. And not everyone is out here developing an app, or a widget, or something.

Oftentimes, it's just like I have this theory about how people should relate to each other in school systems, and that's the innovation. But how do we make sure that we're helping those teams who have developed this innovation transition from just an idea, or a research project in a couple of locations, to something that's being more widely implemented?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And how's that going?

**Adrienne Woods:**

It's going great. I joined this project last year, and I'm on the product team. So we work with four groups that have developed an educational product or an intervention that has been demonstrated to be effective, that does accelerate student learning back up to grade level. And we are offering support and expertise to help them take that intervention or innovation and scale it, get it into the hands of more students, and teachers, and schools. And make sure that that actual evidence-based, effective evidence-based work is being disseminated to the folks that need it most. So it's been a learning experience, I think, all around, pun intended, a learning experience.

And part of it has been on our end, we've just been trying to figure out how do we make this engaging for these product teams? How do we make our time helping them worth it? What do they need in order to be successful? And I think this is a question that ... Because this has been done successfully in a lot of other fields and spaces, but education is, like I said, it's very different.

And oftentimes as educators, we're not trying to develop something to make money off of it. We're trying to develop something to help students and teachers and families. So creating a business plan and creating a product that makes money is not at the forefront of our mind. And I think in some ways, making money is not always the end goal. But sustaining the innovation and making sure that you can support yourself while you get it out to people who need it is maybe oftentimes the goal of scaling for a lot of these product teams.

And so, trying to help them figure out, how do we do this in a way that stays true to our intentions to offer this product, and also can help us sustain it in the long term without needing to just continually go back and ask for grants and ask for money? Can we make some sort of, even just a self-sustaining business model so that we can make sure that this is reaching the people who need it?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And it seems too, oftentimes interventions or products that are evidence-based are developed for a smaller market. Like, you live in a town, or you work at a university, and there are schools nearby that have identified this particular problem in their literacy or their mathematics. And so, you're developing a

solution that aligns with that particular need. And so, how is what you're doing with these teams kind of pushing beyond?

**Adrienne Woods:**

So I think all of these teams have demonstrated that they have come up with some sort of solution that is effective and that it improves learning for ... And sometimes for certain groups of students that it's been tested on, but then it expands beyond that, right?

Like, if you've developed an innovation within your particular region to solve a particular problem that you are facing. It's not unlikely that there's a similar problem somewhere else that this could also address. And so, a lot of what we do is helping these teams kind of identify who their end users might be. So who would be the people that are benefiting from their product or their innovation? And then, what do they need to do to adjust their product to get it to those folks who might need it? So there could be a really effective curriculum that's developed in New York City, and it works very well in New York City. But could it also work in Minneapolis? Potentially, but what would we need to change to make sure that it does work in Minneapolis? Could it work in the suburbs?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And what would we need to change overall? Not just change for Minneapolis so that we don't have to do all of these individual changes every time we move it around? Right? It's like, what are the things that we need to change more broadly to be adapted for Minneapolis, or Nashville, or Los Angeles? Or is that the right understanding?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah, I would say so. And I think one of the things that we've been finding is sometimes, say it's an intervention. It's been developed for a very particular group of students, like rural students who need some sort of access to something that's very hard for them to get. And then, they're finding that, well, who's actually using the product now that you've created this and you're selling it, which districts are using it? And we're finding that New York City's [inaudible 00:20:24] taking that too. And we're like, "Wait a minute, that's not rural." So what is it about the product that is appealing and useful to these different places, and how can we leverage that so that we can-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yeah, and maximize the impact.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Mm-hmm. Maximize the impact, exactly. Exactly.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And so, you said you stretched. What about this is helping you stretch?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Well, a couple of things. So as education researchers, we're not really trained necessarily to have an entrepreneurial mindset. We're kind of trained to come up with a cool idea, and to study it and see whether it works. But there's a really incredible researcher Liz Farley-Ripple who's at University of Delaware. Who has done a lot of work, and I hope I'm getting this right. Liz, come on the podcast, and correct me if I'm wrong.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Right, right. Exactly.

**Adrienne Woods:**

But she has done a lot of work looking at how educators and administrators make decisions about which products and curricula to adopt, and whether they choose to adopt evidence-based products, or whether and why they might not choose to adopt evidence-based products. And she's really found that the main driver to adopting something is ... And making a decision about something is almost like a word of mouth.

If there's someone you trust, another educator you trust, another principal you trust, and they recommend something, you're going to be more likely to adopt that. Because that's how it works. And so, I think, at least in my mind, I'm guilty of this. I've definitely said, "Oh, here's this great idea. Once this is out in the world, people will just do it, because it's the right thing to do, and it makes sense." But that's not how the real world works.

And we need, I think, as a field, we need to be better about kind of thinking about that end user from the get-go. When we are creating and designing something. Is this actually ... First of all, is this really a pressing problem for schools? It could be a problem, but if it's not one of the top problems, no one's going to-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Do it.

**Adrienne Woods:**

No one's going to use it, right?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Right.

**Adrienne Woods:**

So making sure that we're keeping our end user, our ... The people and the children that we're designing this for in mind as we invent, as we go through this whole process of creating whatever we're creating, that's something that has helped my work tremendously. Just to think about where do I want this to go, and what do I need to know now in order to make sure that I'm setting myself up to potentially transition this to market? And that's again, sort of that impact that I was talking about that I want to have in the world. I don't want to just come up with a cool idea and write a paper and say, "I've done this and it's great, and everyone should do it," because that's not how change actually happens. At least not what the research shows.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Coming from a researcher.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Coming from a researcher.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

So I'm going to go ahead and believe you.



**Adrienne Woods:**

Right. Yeah. So that's been really helpful in learning this project. The other thing in particular, if I can give a specific example of this.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yes, please.

**Adrienne Woods:**

I mentioned that one of my big career goals is to really improve data in special ed. So I've started working on a project this past year that is very much in its infancy, but it is essentially trying to do exactly that. It's trying to make better use of data from individualized education programs, which are the contract between the student, and the family, and the school about what the student's disability-related needs are, what services the school is going to provide. What their goals are, what accommodations they're going to receive, how-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Commonly referred to as an IEP.

**Adrienne Woods:**

An IEP, correct. Yes.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yes.

**Adrienne Woods:**

So IEPs are these legal documents. Every child with a disability that receives special education has to have an IEP. There are so many sections on IEPs that are legally required. You have to fill these out, you have to indicate all these things. It's so much paperwork for special education teachers. And then beyond that, there's so many things from these IEPs that have to be reported out, up to the district level, up to the state level, up to the federal level. And IEPs themselves, the format, even though the content can be the same across students, across districts, across states, the actual format, the structure of the IEP is not the same. It really depends on the software that the school might be using. They could have their own template. They could work with a company like ... I mean, use EasyIEP or GoIDEA, something like that.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Or their state maybe has a template that they're using.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Or their state has a template. Exactly. So the actual structure of this document varies pretty dramatically. And it's all text-based, and it's all full of student names. So it's really inaccessible beyond just like-

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Oh, gosh. Right, yeah.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Just, if I write an IEP, I can use that IEP to work with that one student. But as far as evaluating for patterns across IEPs, if I'm a district admin, and I want to look at how special ed is doing in my district, how do I do that? It's very difficult.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And do you report out about it?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Exactly. You have to manually, and a lot of times go through each one of these IEPs and pull information. And everyone's going to do that differently. And so, there's no systematic way to do this. So my idea is if we can automate that process, if we can streamline that process, if we can make IEP data more accessible for teachers and schools who want to look at it for administrators who need to report on it, for families who might want to check on how their child is doing in school, that would help so many people.

It would help researchers who want to be able to ask and answer these really cool creative questions about special ed. And so, I'm exploring the feasibility of actually doing this, of trying to improve this data. And eventually, I would like to create something that I can transition back to market that I can offer back to schools.

One idea that I've had that I've talked with schools is what if we created a dashboard, where when you identify a student as having a disability, and you say, "These are their disability related needs. These are the services we're going to give them." Every student is unique, but what if we could say, "Based on the other students who have a similar profile of needs, here's how well these services worked or didn't work."

And you could prescribe sort of the right dosage of services right at that moment. Again, that early intervention idea, and make sure that you're setting them up for long-term success. What if you could look at a trend line for every time a student takes an assessment, you get a piece of data. How well are the services that you're giving to the student actually supporting them in meeting their IEP goals? Are they going to meet their goals based on that trend? Do you need to adjust things to make sure that they get to where you want them to be by the end of the year? If we had better data, we could ask and answer these questions in a way that I don't think we're really able to do now.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And it also, that concept sounds really cool. As a former secondary teacher, so often the responsibility was on us to just know. And the special education teacher has a caseload and they have all the paperwork, but we're supposed to know the accommodations that our students have because we're in full inclusion schools. And what are the modifications that they need when they're doing test taking and things like that. But if a teacher, a general ed teacher, were able to go and look at this dashboard and say, "This accommodation is actually not working well for this student. Maybe instead of giving them 10 extra minutes on a test, they need 20." Because they're not getting all the way through the test. They don't even have an opportunity to complete the test.

And so I can make that adjustment in my classroom to give them additional time. I was already working the accommodation. I was already doing the accommodation, but I wasn't doing it in a way that was really giving the student the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skills.

**Adrienne Woods:**

The accommodation is working, but could it be working better?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Exactly.

**Adrienne Woods:**

And can we adjust it to make sure that it's working at its maximal capacity?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Right, and then we can make an adjustment in the IEP to say, "Hey, we've been looking at this. We can see that this trend is working. If we are giving the student a little bit more time, we can see the difference. Let's formally change what that accommodation is in their IEP so that they're able to have this accommodation in all of their classes."

**Adrienne Woods:**

And there are things that work and don't work about special ed. And sometimes teachers need some adjustments to make sure, like you just said, "We're doing this accommodation. It's not actually working, so let's pivot to something else." Sometimes teachers know that. And they're like, "I need to do this with my child." And I feel like we've all had those teachers that are just ... That's special. They just kind of get it.

And I can say in special ed, that's especially true. There are some really talented, brilliant people out there who just kind of intuitively know what to do. But could you imagine if they had the data to back that up. And to say, "I'm making this decision and it's the right decision, and here is how you can tell that it's the right decision." It's not just, "Well, this is an experienced teacher. They have a lot of ... They've done this for years and years, so they probably know what's best."

We actually can sort of measure that and use the knowledge and expertise of those teachers to teach others in professional learning situations, and identify the teachers that are doing it really well in a district. And say, "Hey, you need to be a peer mentor, and you're doing this well, and I would love for you to share that knowledge back with your colleagues." There are so many applications of just improving the data. And so, [inaudible 00:29:49]

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

That goes back to your systems.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yep. It would change the system. The system could improve outcomes for students. It would be a very holistic kind of endeavor. And that really goes back to what I've been learning with the LEARN Network, which is there's a framework that they use called the Invent-Apply Transition Framework. And it's something, it's a tool that SRI has developed that anyone can access and use. But it really talks about when you start coming up with an innovation, where is it going, and how are you considering the needs of schools, and how are you setting yourself up to have success, to actually have this scale in a way that is going to make a difference in the world?

Because you could have the most brilliant idea ever, and if you don't set it up correctly for a school to adopt it, they're not going to do it. And it doesn't matter how brilliant the thing is. You have to make sure that you're working to get it into the hands of people that need it.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

So if we could think about what you're trying to do in terms of advanced educational and societal opportunities for children with disabilities in the K-12 space, and you did it, what would that look like?

**Adrienne Woods:**

That's an impossible question.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

No, we're dreaming together.

**Adrienne Woods:**

We're dreaming. The reason I said it was an impossible question is I could look so many different ways depending on the student, and their needs, and the context. But I think the overarching theme would be that everybody ... This is an idealistic view of education in general. It doesn't matter whether you have a disability, whether you don't have a disability, what your disability is, how severe your educational needs might be, how intense your challenges are. You are getting the same opportunities to get the same amount of growth out of your education as everyone else. So we're really talking about removing barriers, but also setting up students to be successful regardless of what success looks like for them.

For whatever their goals are. And the other thing, this is a side note. But I feel like if we are able to remove those barriers, and we're able to allow children to be successful, I think the definition of success for children with disabilities in particular would change a lot. Because right now, and in the past, it's kind of historically been ... In the law, for years, it was just they're entitled to education.

They're entitled to a free and appropriate education in the least restrictive environment, and that's it. And in 2017, I think it was, the Supreme Court said, "That's not enough. You have to be giving them an education that is doing something. It needs to be providing some sort of educational benefit. The IEP services. You have to demonstrate that they're going to do something for this student. You can't just give them services and say, 'That's okay.'"

And so, just the expectations that we have for our students, I think we could change those if we removed barriers to actually accessing education in a way that would allow them to make those growth opportunities, and to learn to the best of their potential.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And it would also impact the societal norms around people who have disabilities. It would evolve that space as well. It's like schools replicate society then those same sorts of barriers, those same sorts of perceptions can be disrupted at a larger level on a more societal level.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right. Right, and I think one really clear example of this, and this is on my mind because I wrote it to a grant proposal, is people with disabilities oftentimes express more interest and aspirations to a STEM career, science, technology, engineering, math career than their peers without disabilities. Typically, students with disabilities want to be in those careers more.

But they're not entering those fields. They can score the same as their peers without disabilities. They express the same, if not more levels of career aspirations, but they're not being hired into those jobs. And why is that? And what barriers are there to entering the STEM field that we can address? And I think a lot of that is probably societal. And so, if we start at the beginning, we start with education, and we change ... This is such an idealistic thing to say, but let's change hearts and minds.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

That's my whole thing. I'm with you.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

I'm totally with you.

**Adrienne Woods:**

And if we can do that, then the sky's the limit.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yeah. I am on that ideal plane with you. Because that's really what it comes down to. It's like we get two or three or five people together who have a strong vision and believe that we can create something different. And it's like that five people turns into 10 people, and that 10 people turns into 20, and that 20 turns into a hundred. And we're just slowly ... A movement is starting, and the movement is starting by changing hearts and minds.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right. Right, and it's like we're shooting for the moon. We're striving for perfection. We're striving for a society free of barriers. We're striving for an education system where all children have the same opportunities to learn regardless of disability, ability, status, background, cultural factors, school systems, whatever. They have the same opportunities. And we're always kind of striving for that. And if we get to 90%, could you imagine how much better our society would be? So, yeah, maybe this idealistic world is one that I would like to live in, and would like to move the needle towards.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

And it's like even if you can't live in it, you can build it for the kids who are in school today, and for the future.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Exactly.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

So one last, or two last questions. One is, you talked about your why, and so I'm going to say that that keeps you coming back. But if you want to describe even more detailed, it's like you've been doing this for a really long time. You, I'm sure, have hit roadblocks, barriers, obstacles. You've had to pivot and say, "This space isn't working. I need to come over and try it [inaudible 00:36:03] So what keeps you pushing the boulder up the mountain in the day to day? What keeps you coming back?"

**Adrienne Woods:**

Honestly, I think it's finding a like-minded group of people. Like you, Kori, who we can sit here and have this discussion about the ideal society we would like to live in and how we're going to dismantle barriers, and move towards that. And kind of sharing that passion. I think that's really important. Because when it gets hard, when you experience setbacks, when you have a really great idea, and no one agrees with you. When you don't get a grant funded, and you're like, "Why not? Come on." I think having a network, a support network like that is very helpful, very important, and really keeps me in the game. If I didn't have that, I would've burned out a long time ago. Because this is really hard work. It's really abstract work. Like we talked about. My general career goals are in no uncertain terms to make things better for kids

with disabilities. And that is a very hard thing to do, and could be done a lot of different ways. So I think it's the people, I would say.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yeah. Knowing that you're not in it by yourself.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

You're not pushing that boulder alone.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Right [inaudible 00:37:20]

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

When you start slipping, somebody else is coming.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Someone's going to help. Yep.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Someone's going to help. Yeah. And so if people would like to continue to learn about-

**Adrienne Woods:**

Pun intended.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

About your work and find you, how can people keep hearing from and about Adrienne Woods?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Well, I am still active on Twitter. Do we still call it Twitter, X?

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Twitter, X. Formerly known as Twitter.

**Adrienne Woods:**

I'm on LinkedIn. I try and share a lot about what I'm doing, and I'm on a bunch of different projects like the LEARN Network I mentioned. They have their own website where they're constantly posting updates, and we're writing blogs, and writing case studies, and working with product teams to really move that needle forward. So just find a way to connect.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

All right.

**Adrienne Woods:**

I would love to find more people who can help me push that boulder up the hill.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Yeah, it's like the more, the merrier, right?

**Adrienne Woods:**

Exactly.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Many hands make for light work.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Exactly.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

Well, Adrienne it has really been a pleasure having you on the podcast today. So thank you for joining us.

**Adrienne Woods:**

Yeah, this has been so fun. Thanks for having me.

**Kori Hamilton Biagas:**

My pleasure. And thank you all for listening to the SRI Homeroom, produced from SRI. Take care, and we'll see you next time. Thank you for joining us on the SRI Homeroom, produced by SRI Education, a division of SRI. Adrienne Woods is a senior education researcher with SRI Education. Learn more about Adrienne and her work in today's show notes. Find all of our episodes, transcripts, and links to other resources by visiting [sri.com/education](http://sri.com/education). You can also connect with us on social media with the links in today's show notes. The views expressed in today's podcast belong solely to the participants, and do not represent the views of SRI or any organizational funder or partner.