1. In a School District Far, Far Away, with very limited resources, and many diverse students… there lived a powerful Queen named Karen, who dreamed of opening a school for ALL students with high needs, and would be known as an alternative school. Let’s take a walk down memory lane…

2. While the Queen dreamed, across town sat a very sad, lonely old state hospital building. The Queen had been looking for such a building a very long time, and wanted to have a peek. Once inside, the kind Queen knew in her heart this building would work and would become the best safe haven for her beloved students.

3. Thus was born the St. Joseph School District Colgan Alternative Resource Center. It soon became known far and wide as the home for high risk students for as long as they needed. The Queen organized the school and was able to fill the needs of self-contained E.D students K-12; Middle/High School Juvenile Offenders; Social Skills training for K-6; and High School Credit Recovery. The people of the city were thrilled!

4. The Queen carefully chose the Faculty at the Colgan Alternative Resource Center, and it quickly grew, and the loyal staff remained steadfast over the years. The educators were very creative, and knew the challenge would be to meet the needs of each individual student, PLUS possess the ability to think out of the box! (Or in it, as this much-loved Science Teacher!)

5. The Colgan Alternative Resource Center was growing in leaps and bounds, and the Queen began to see a trend in consistently managing the very diverse classrooms, due to severe behavioral issues. The Queen appointed a Leadership team to assist. The team put their heads together and researched Missouri Schoolwide Positive Behavior Support, after visiting a neighboring school district using SW-PBS. They were immediately hooked and a plan began to formulate.

6. The Leadership Team began by educating the entire staff in the research of SW-PBS, and showed them evidence of success using the state and national data. The staff involved included certified and non-certified - teachers, para’s, cooks, maintenance, bus drivers, secretary, nurse, school resource officer…The Queen wanted everyone to know about this wonderful practice!

7. The leadership team was so excited to begin the process, but recognized the District had to take it one step at a time, and the Queen constantly reminded them, “It’s a Marathon…NOT a Sprint!” and that to become a really great school with a system in place would take time and could not be achieved overnight!

8. As a school, the Queen held court several times during the summer and everyone was in attendance. We would often meet on the grounds and have snacks and great conversation to put our first piece in place! Thus, our working Matrix was born in August 2009…The Four B’s – BE SAFE, BE RESPECTFUL, BE RESPONSIBLE, AND BE IN CONTROL. The Queen was ecstatic!

9. The Queen realized the students were wary of change, and wanted them to feel included and safe, so she sent out a survey to all the students, asking them to write down their ideas for a school mascot. It was then narrowed down to The Colgan Cougars; The Colgan Tigers; and the Colgan Knights. Another survey went out and we became The Colgan Knights – with the colors of Red, Black and Silver. Student voices had been heard!

10. The Queen issued a proclamation to put together a reward system that included free and frequent, intermittent, and long and strong. Student’s in secondary created the Notable Knight, and all students were asked to fill out a survey with their preferences, and the Tier 1 team put the system in place based upon student suggestions. This is an example of the Secondary program, and each program has their own specific menu.

11. The Tier 1 team wanted a school pledge that emitted what their belief is for all students, that they be “treated with dignity and respect” and they are “valued as individuals.” This would be a safe haven for all!!!!! The Colgan Commitment was created, and gave students permission to value themselves daily with positive words that ***they are important, they can do their best, and they CAN BE The CHANGE FOR GOOD.***  The good Queen smiled!!!

12. So now, the hard part! Making a desolate old hospital building have the appearance of a ‘real’ school. Even though the shiny floors are very fun to roller-blade on – and that’s a story for another time – the bland colors and blank walls are not conducive to wanting to be at school and learn. The Queen gathered her Tier 1 team together and they held court for several hours. What to do, what to do?

13. So we started at the office… The Queen knew It was important for all students to know that no matter what, they were welcome in the office and their voices would be heard…The walls were painted pink and had fun chairs, soothing sensory fidgets, and a calming room adjacent. Over the years, we learned that even the most intense behaviors appeared to calm once they entered these walls.

14. Upon entering the building was an empty lobby and locked doors, thus reminding the Queen, the students & the staff constantly that this had been a former mental hospital. Pretty colored signs with positive words became visible, inviting furniture filled the lobby, and everyone is welcome. When students enter the building, they see how valued and loved they are. Behind the once barren walls, now lives a philosophy of kindness, caring & consistency.

15. The teaching of the expectations began during the second semester of the first year. All classrooms had a poster size matrix and was allowed to create their own. This is an example of some created by students. Other classrooms painted them on the wall, painted on a window, etc. The Queen gave the students freedom to express themselves. This particular year, a classroom painted a bathroom in Silver, Red, and Black!!!!

16. The Queen loved to display colorful signage and remind the students of what she expected in this safe environment. Here is an example of a classroom teacher/students giving the visuals for the expected behavior and tying it to the Matrix. We learned that year to remove the words “NO< STOP & DON’T”, but not before taking this picture!

17. This particular classroom was a dorm room for the state hospital, and the windows up on the left was the former nurse’s station. Upon moving in, 2 classrooms at the end of each wing turned the old station into a beautiful office. This is such an inviting classroom to read, and complete work. The Queen visits often and loves to sit and read with students.

18. To go along with our Knights theme – the Tier 1 SW-PBS team created a recognition bulletin board that is updated weekly and monthly for each different award. Students and teachers earn awards and are posted on the board and recognized via the intercom, notes home, phone calls to parents, etc. In addition, each student of the week leads the entire building through the Pledge of Allegiance and the Colgan Commitment for the next week.

19. Mission Accomplished!!!! The students with high needs now had a REAL SCHOOL they could call their own and they never hesitated to tell everyone how much it meant to them. Students often wanted to remain at the Colgan Alternative Resource Center even when they were ready to go back to their home school. Building relationships is what it’s all about!

20. The Queen sends her heartfelt thanks for your interest in her dream come true! A safe setting for ALL students All the time! Thank you! Almost forgot…bet you’re wondering how NASA fit into all of this? My love of Science! Once a week I would don a Lab Coat and become “Katy O’Grady, The Science Old Lady” and teach every Science class at Colgan. Thanks for watching!