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In December of last year, we saw the picture of a young two old boy named Kenzo seeing himself in Antonio, a character from the Disney movie Encanto. It went viral with the hashtag #representationmatters. Kenzo's mother was on Good Morning America talking about that picture and how impactful the power in representation can be. She was speaking about the empowerment of representation in black and brown children. A message that has been coming to the forefront in the face of change. To take it further, we need to expand and include disability representation. This includes all disabilities, not just those that can be seen with the naked eye. Eighteen percent of the students in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania are identified with a disability and receiving special education services. Of that, almost half of those students identified as a student with a specific learning disability. An eighth of those students identify with a speech language impairment. It is critical that we celebrate the contributions from neurodiverse individuals as well. When we see people that face similar challenges, we then realize we are not so different after all. Our potential is endless. This shouldn't be limited because someone is disabled. This is how we can build an inclusive community and create a sense of belonging. By showcasing the contributions from disabled individuals, we can bring reality into focus and provide opportunities for our students with disabilities to say I can and I will. Did you know the Civil Rights Activist, Maya Angelou, developed selective mutism from a traumatic experience as a child, yet she transformed the literary world? Or that Alexander Graham Bell was deaf in one ear and hard of hearing in the other? He overcame those challenges to invent the phonograph or what we now know as the record player.

Disability representation has the ability to change established perceptions, such as stereotyping that we have seen in the media where disabled individuals are viewed as less than. Taking a balanced approach and integrating the contributions of disabled individuals alongside those without disabilities in the school curriculum provides opportunities for awareness, setting the tone that we are all equals regardless of who are. We each have something to bring to the table. Fostering an inclusive community in the school sets the stage for a more inclusive, understanding world.