

Stories of HOPE



HOPE Christian High School basketball star returns to serve alma mater

HOPE Christian High School graduate LaKendra Washington never planned to return to Milwaukee when she left in 2009 for a promising collegiate basketball career at Liberty University in Lynchburg, Virginia. She dreamed of playing in the WNBA or perhaps one day coaching after college.

However, when she graduated from Liberty in 2013 with a degree in graphic design, LaKendra chose to return home to help her mother Shenita Jackson, a teacher's assistant at HOPE Prima, care for her ill grandparents.

After her return to Milwaukee, LaKendra's mother informed her of an open position in the second grade. LaKendra jumped at the chance to rejoin HOPE, where she has now worked for the past four years.

"I never expected to be a teacher's assistant but God had a different plan for me," says LaKendra, the first HOPE High School student to attend college on a full Division I basketball scholarship. "It has been a blessing and a great opportunity. I immediately fell in love with the kids and now see my work as a way to give back to a school that supported me."

LaKendra struggled in school as a young student and reached out for additional help provided through Title Services. She attributes her long-term academic success to that extra support.



“God calls us ‘to be the light of the world.’ My hope is that we’ll all come together, love each other, and finally have peace.”
-LaKendra Washington

"When I talk to kids who have those same challenges, I tell them 'I was one of you,'" says LaKendra. "If I can make it, I am certain you can make it too if you put your mind to it and never give up."

HOPE Christian High School prepared LaKendra for the academic rigors of college, and it was also the personal encouragement from several HOPE staff members including principal Tommy Myles, coaches Stephanie Bahr and John Metsger, teacher Dr. Roberts and choir director Kenneth Daniel that allowed her to pursue her dreams.

This extraordinary support included Principal Myles giving LaKendra's basketball coach time off work to drive her to Liberty for a tour because she couldn't afford the plane ticket. Having benefitted from such kindness, she wants to give back to her alma mater.



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Both on the court and in the classroom, LaKendra focuses on bringing love and faith to her students' lives. For three years, LaKendra coached middle school basketball at HOPE Prima and began her first year as head coach of the HOPE HS girls' varsity basketball program in the 2016-17 school year.

Coaching is a dream come true for LaKendra. Beyond helping her student-athletes develop their skills on the court, she uses the game to teach her players about Jesus and his role in their lives.

"I tell them if they keep moving, keep going, and keep God in the mix, then anything is possible," says LaKendra, who was brought to tears when her player, Tajahnae McLemore, credited her first conference honors to LaKendra's mentoring.

Mentor is a role LaKendra is proud to play.

"As educators, we work with kids that may not have eaten last night and we could be the only highlight of their day," says LaKendra. "We need to bring our all every day and show our commitment to these kids. That is what they look for and need. I want to be a mentor to these kids and push them to achieve their goals in life and go down a path that would please God."

HOPE Christian Schools is a network of eight Christian college preparatory schools serving nearly 2,500 scholars and their families in Milwaukee and Racine.

HOPE is supported and managed by Open Sky Education, an entrepreneurial, not-for-profit organization in tireless pursuit of a full and lasting education for all children.