

Fresh out of college, I was full of confidence about teaching. I had attended Michigan State University and studied in their top ranking Elementary Education program. I had graduated with honors, from the Honors College and I had teaching in the bag. So when I met "Jane", a feisty 6th grader born with Apert Syndrome, who had more surgeries than years of her life, I was surprised to find I knew absolutely nothing about special education. I walked into her IEP wondering what the letters stood for, and I knew right then and there that general educators need to have a firm grasp of special education.

With the help of my students and colleagues, I soaked in knowledge about teaching all students, including those with disabilities. I knew that more had to be done, I had to go back to school and learn more. I applied to Michigan State University's Special Education Master's Program. I had one goal in mind: to advocate for students with special needs. I decided the best way to do this would be to become a special education teacher. As a special educator, I wanted to build challenging IEP goals for my students and push them to achieve all that was possible. I was inspired by the case of *Andrew F. Vs. Douglas County School District* that determined that schools were required to set goals for special education students that were meaningful and ambitious. In the program, and through my work as a general educator, I realized I had a secondary goal. Too often, I felt that there were two sides to education: special and general. The two sets of teachers should share one goal, to educate their students. However, in my courses and in class, I felt like the two sides were opposing forces. They both want to help their students but there was quite a bit of animosity between the two sets of educators. This, of course, is only one educator's experience and is not a universal truth.

One day in class, I read an article that changed my goal completely. In the article, there was the issue that I always felt. It described how special educators can feel that general educators don't know enough about special needs to provide for their students, and general educators feel that special educators don't know the curriculum and can't teach it. The article, whose name I wish I could remember, suggested that more needed to be done in the early education of teachers to bond the two together. Only when general educators and special educators work in tandem can a student reach their full potential. This became the focus of all of my energy, and the purpose for this site.

I taught my colleagues everything I could about what I was learning at Michigan State. They were thankful that someone was taking the time to teach them about their special education students. My colleagues affectionately referred to me as the "special educator" of the group and offered to give me all their students. I worked with them and we taught each other. I changed programs to stay in the general education classroom but specializing in special education.

My life is changing again. My husband and I are starting a family, and I am taking time off from the classroom, but not from my goal. My goal now is to provide a bridge between special education and general education. The goal of this website, and my work going forward, is to educate general education teachers on the students that they may need more information about, and how to build a relationship with their special education partners. It is on all of us to work together to give children their best chance at success.