

# National Association of Special Education Teachers (NASET)

## THE PRACTICAL TEACHER

***This Month's Topic:***

### **The Five Secrets to Being a Special Education Teacher and Still Loving Your Job**

The job of a special education teacher is not an easy one, and additional pressures from budget cuts, new school initiatives, and professional development can be overwhelming. This issue of NASET's Practical Teacher was provided by the National Dissemination Center for Children with Disabilities. Written by Tim Villegas, he shares how he manages to stay positive and connected to kids and families. The article focuses on five secrets to being a special education teacher and still absolutely loving it.

### **Do you want to know the secrets to working in Special Education and still love your job? Read on...**

If you are reading this... it probably means that there is still hope for you. Perhaps you are young and not yet jaded by the persistent thumb of the public education system pressed firmly on your back. Perhaps you are an optimist, who tries to see the silver lining in everything. Or perhaps you have already figured out the secrets to working in a job that has little pay, little respect, and little support. Here my five secrets to being a special education teacher who still absolutely loves it.

#### **1. Understand that it is not about YOU.**

We did not enter into a career in education to become millionaires... In fact, the only people that are really making money in this industry are the test makers (I don't know that for sure...just venting a little). So... if you did not do it for the money... why are you a special education teacher? I know it was not JUST because teachers

have the summer off! How many of us work Extended School Year (ESY), plan and dream about the following school year during the summer?

We do what we do because we love to work with kids. We do what we do because we enjoy people (or at least I hope we do). When we realize that it is not really about US... it's about what we can do for other people, our kiddos, our paraprofessionals, our co-teachers, and fellow staff... we can let go of trying to make our situation perfect for us. Being a teacher is a collaborative profession... which brings me to the next secret.

## **2. Realize you are not alone.**

There are approximately [3.9 million teachers](#) (including public and private) in the United States. Whether they are special education teachers or not... each one of them has a stake in education as a whole and has an interest in making it better. It can be easy to feel isolated especially if you are special education teacher in a small district. Perhaps you feel alienated by the school staff. You are a vital part of your school community, even if you don't think you are. Know that there are thousands of teachers... just like you... who are struggling to do the same thing.

## **3. Develop your Personal Learning Network (PLN).**

Are you on [Facebook](#)? No? Go get an account... I can wait...

Are you on [Twitter](#)? No? Really? Okay... I can spare a minute...

Are you on [Linkedin](#)? Okay... now this may take some time.

These three social media outlets are VITAL to establishing your leaning community. I understand that this requires you to be somewhat tech savvy... but guess what, folks. Technology is a huge part of the shift in education. If we do not get on board with technology, we are going to be left out in the dust.

The big point here is to connect with people who are interested in the same things and then read, watch, and do.

## **4. Have high expectations for yourself and your students.**

Nothing irks me more than hearing a teacher say, "They are never going to get anything out of that!" or "So-and-so should have never been placed in (insert LRE placement here)...they should have been in (insert more restrictive placement) all along!"

Have some respect for your students that they can learn and will learn when given the correct supports. It is too easy to place the blame on someone else for why a student is in your classroom. Believe that you CAN teach any student! You are a special education teacher for a reason... you want to help realize a student's potential. If you don't know how to do it... there are ways to figure it out. Don't give up on your student or yourself. You will become a better person and a better teacher for it. Where there is a will, there is a way.

## 5. Make friends with General Education Teachers and then collaborate with them.

Okay... this is really the silver bullet. If you are Special Education Teacher and you sit alone in your classroom during your lunch and planning period.... you are missing out on the richness of developing relationships within the school community. Once I opened up myself to know and befriend other teachers who did not teach my kiddos... I saw a whole other world. Sometimes it is easy to segregate ourselves from our school staff, and then, when we don't feel included or are not invited to things, we point the finger at them.

Something that has transformed my teaching is to collaborate with general education teachers on lessons that my class and their class can do together. This way...,it is not just about integrating special needs students and typical students...,it is about designing lessons so that EVERYONE can participate and get something meaningful out of it. No longer can we use the excuse... "Well... they won't get anything out of this." They WILL because we can set it up for our kids to be successful.

If we apply these secrets to our education practice... I promise you will love your job. In fact... you may even want to start a blog to write about it. It happened to me.