

For this assignment, I chose to interview my colleague Sarah Moss. Not only because we work closely with one another, but also because she, like myself, unexpectedly found herself in Special Education. My hope was that I would be able to contrast my own experience with some of hers.

Sarah has been teaching for 13 years. She spent most of that time teaching high school agriculture, but ultimately began looking for a different opportunity to stay in education after years of facilitating FFA activities on top of her teaching responsibilities. This attempt to stay in education while finding a position that gave her a better work life balance led her to subbing and ultimately deciding to teach in a Extensive Support Needs classroom. While Sarah never thought she would teach Special Education she is enjoying teaching her 9th and 10th grade students. Two reasons she mentioned were the smaller class sizes and that she appreciates working with the high schoolers. One of the greatest challenges that Mrs. Moss is having transitioning to Special Education is working with paraprofessionals. While having a group of 3-5 more adults in the room can be helpful it also has its challenges. Some of these challenges are that because Paraprofessionals do not get paid enough and many people are intimidated by working with special needs children some paraprofessionals do get complacent. Another challenge that can arise is that when you have a lot of capable people who all have different ideas about how things should be done this can lead to unnecessary tension at times. Sarah also shared some of the other challenges teachers face. She talked about how students don't show teachers as much respect as they previously did. She also mentioned that parents aren't as supportive as they used to be. Another challenge she mentioned was the more universal teacher's struggles of not getting paid enough for all the extra time and energy we put into planning. Some of the positive things Sarah shared was how it is important when you are new to realize that your coworkers are there to help you and to not be afraid to ask for that help. They truly want you to succeed.

Another encouraging thing she shared was how your first two years are the hardest but things tend to go better after that.

I think one of the ways that what Sarah said discouraged me is just how students are not as respectful as they have been in the past and that parents are not as supportive. I have definitely through substitute teaching and my own teaching experienced difficult behaviors that over time start to wear down on you. I think it is important to navigate these challenges by having a strong support system of fellow teachers who are in similar places in their career as well as veteran teachers who can give you perspective. I also think it is important to realize that learning how to support students through behavioral issues is a process. Lastly, I think having a support system outside of the classroom that can give you perspective is important. One of the answers that Mrs. Moss gave that inspired me was how she tries to build community through creating opportunities to have fun with her students and make sure they know they are in a safe environment. A part of my reason for teaching absolutely stems from a desire to create learning environments for children where they gain a love of learning through fun and engaging activities. One thing that did make me hopeful is when she shared how the first two years are the hardest, but that you learn to be a better teacher over the course of the first few years. I think something that surprised me was how she made sure to share how challenging teaching can be at times. I have done this assignment once before but that interview left me a lot more hopeful than this interview. That being said, I do think this information allows me to have an accurate understanding of what teaching can be like. I think contrasting both interviews I am able to see that teaching is both really rewarding and fun but also very difficult at times. I think more my experience versus this interview has influenced me to leave special education to pursue my original plan of hopefully teaching second grade. I do think this interview confirms some of the difficulties that I have been having learning to manage four different staff members.

In summary, this interview has given me useful advice, and given me insight into how someone in a similar situation is experiencing teaching Special Education for the first time. I have seen both the similarities and differences. I also felt that Mrs. Moss tried to give me a true picture of what teaching in our current climate is like and with this information I hope to use it to grow and have realistic expectations of teaching as I progress on this journey.

## Appendix

**Credentialed Teacher:** Sarah Moss

**Grades:** High School Special Education: Extensive Support Needs 9/10th grade, High School agriculture (in the past)

### **Questions:**

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. What grade/s or content area/s are you teaching now?
3. Is this the grade/content area that you thought you wanted to teach when you were in the credential program?
  - a. Do you think that your present grade level/content area is the ideal match for you?
4. What do you like best about this grade level/content area? What are the challenges?
5. What does the curriculum look like at this grade level/content area? What are some main instructional units you teach?
6. What are some specific physical, emotional, and intellectual characteristics of students this age?
7. What are some of the major challenges that teachers face in education today?
  - a. Are there specific issues that California teachers face? How do you face these challenges?
8. How did the pandemic impact teaching for you?
9. What advice do you have for beginning teachers?
10. How do you build community and a positive learning environment in your classroom?
11. How do you develop trust between you and your students?

