

The weeks leading up to the month of June have been quite labor intensive for me. Amongst my other responsibilities, I am the coordinator of our Extended School Year (ESY) for the Special Needs students in our district. We have over 180 students who are attending the program.

I have been amazed at the blessings that have been prevalent during this process. For me, I began working on ESY in January and it will conclude on June 28th. There has been hard work and frustrations along the way, but the blessings definitely outweigh the challenges. Helping to provide a safe and positive learning environment for each student is the ultimate goal for me. The staff has been remarkable. Some of the blessings that I have experienced just during the month of June include:

- Developing relationships with multiple new staff members from across the district and reconnecting with individuals I have worked with in the past.
- The Director and Assistant Director of Special Ed for the district have come to work, rolling up their sleeves and doing anything that is needed. Their active involvement demonstrates that we have 'all hands on deck' from all staff present.
- The willingness to offer assistance has amazed me. We use old fashioned walkie-talkies since they are readily accessible to us, especially when a crisis occurs. One day, a call on the walkie-talkie asked for assistance from anyone who knows a specific student. Gretchen (Assistant Director) and I rushed to the room to see 2 other teachers already there, helping to calm the student. Those teachers had walkie talkies due to the potential need for assistance within their classrooms. Once they heard the specific request, they rushed to assist. They knew the student and specific strategies unique for that student (he attended the school where they taught), so they rushed and provided the needed assistance. They were able to calm him. A few days later when the walkie talkie call came talkie for the same student, the same teachers arrived and remained until he was calm. This shows their willingness to help in a time of need and willingness for their classroom staff to manage their students without the teacher present.
- We started ESY with a skeletal number of staff due to last minute additions of students being identified to attend, and the unfortunate inability of a few staff to fulfill their ESY duties. We have no subs, so we provide staffing within the hired staff. Staff have been absent due to significant medical concerns amongst their family members (lung cancer diagnosis, nervous breakdown, hospitalized with pneumonia, taking parent to medical appointments) as well as typical illnesses. When informing individuals they will be placed in a different room to provide coverage, they have accepted those requests without hesitation. We needed to disperse a class of challenging students one day (with the potential of the remaining 3 weeks at the time). Individuals approached me, **requesting** to take the most challenging students and accepting them with open arms into their classrooms. I have not heard one negative comment about a staff member's absence; but have heard sincere concern for the well-being of the absent staff member and their family members.
- The school bus called late one afternoon. No one was at the residence where they were to drop off the student. The student is McKinney Vento (has been homeless and currently living out of our district, about 13 miles from school). The bus was returning the student back to campus. There were no answers at any of the emergency numbers we had. At one point we had 3 phones in our office being used to find a solution, with Transportation, the Homeless Liaison, myself and our Physical Therapist working diligently to find a contact person. The most important concern for each of us was that we wanted to contact an adult familiar with the little

6 year old boy. He needed someone to take care of him and a place to go. (We finally connected with Grandpa, who was 23 miles away. Grandpa came and picked him up from school an hour later).

The sacrifices that are made daily, the concern that is demonstrated constantly, the flexibility that is offered regularly and the genuine smiles and laughter that is shared brighten the day, every day. Through this, I have appreciated witnessing our Enduring Practices being portrayed daily. God has been present throughout all aspects of ESY.

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