The Art of Switching Careers: From Lawyer to Special Education Teacher

Hometown: Pittsburgh, PA
Education: M.Ed. ‘15 Special Education (Behavior and Learning Disabilities), Teaching Certificate, Georgia State University, Atlanta, GA
J.D. ‘01, Emory Law School, Atlanta, GA
B.S. ‘98, Political Science, Emory University
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Employer: Hillside Conant Schools

“If anyone is unhappy in their career, it’s not the end of the world if you take a leap. The rewards could be unbelievable, and may surpass most people’s expectations.”

Stephen Fusco, M.Ed. ‘15

Didn’t feel like I was making a difference
I moved to Atlanta two years before the Olympics were held in the city to attend Emory University. After receiving my bachelor’s degree, I continued at Emory’s law school. I wasn’t sure law was the right field for me, but after earning my J.D., I had a large amount of debt to pay off so I worked for several years at law firms, Equifax and a national medical lab. Eventually, I reached a place in my career where I felt like I wasn’t making a difference in the world, so I walked in, quit and turned to teaching because it was always my calling. With no plan B, I enrolled in the teaching certificate program and worked part-time at Lululemon and Trader Joe’s.

Interdisciplinary approach to teacher preparation
My rationale for choosing special education was there weren’t enough teachers pursuing behavior, learning and disabilities. Since I’d never taught, I researched graduate programs that focused on the practical aspects of teaching, and the last two years have been phenomenal. The Special Education M.Ed. program has prepared me to view my students through multiple lenses by taking an interdisciplinary approach to teacher preparation. I’ve been taught by professors and attended classes with students in psychology, educational policy, school psychology and speech-language pathology.

Not a day goes by that I’m not humbled
Working with this population of kids keeps me on my toes because I have to look at things from different angles to solve problems. Not a day goes by when I’m not humbled and learn to not take life so seriously. As special education teachers, we’re making change for kids that have had a lifetime of no support and are sometimes forgotten. To be that steady component they have everyday, in a life where their family or friends are not around, it is pretty amazing.