

Greetings from Region 1!

The word alternative simply means another possibility. The thought of that is so beautiful in its simplicity. And yet, when you connect the word alternative with the word education, things become unnecessarily complicated. Having another possibility can open up a world of opportunities for growth, learning and new experiences.

Making the decision to move into the world of alternative education wasn't an easy decision for me. I had been teaching Special Education for 15 years and making that change seemed terrifying. It shouldn't have been since I started my career in alternative education, I just didn't know it at the time. Many moons ago, in a small residential school in Albany, NY, where I started my career, a student once spoke words to me that changed my life. As a newly graduated 23 year old in her first Special Education job, I was struggling to apply what I had learned in graduate school to make sense in a classroom. Which, by the way, is one of the secrets they don't tell, you...the textbooks do not cover what the majority of our job entails. My first and only first period student came in and sat under a table every day for 20 days. I said all of the right things that I had learned. "*Let's make good choices...let's look at your success chart, let's make a contract so you can earn privileges...*" Nothing made a dent and under the desk he remained. On day 21, I was waiting for him under the table when he came in. His response? "**What took you so long?"**

So much of alternative education is "**what took you so long?"**

- What took you so long to try this,
- What took you so long to believe in yourself,
- What took you so long to stop banging your head against the wall,
- What took you so long suffering when school didn't have to be such a miserable, lonely, and depressing place?

What took **US** so long to promise to never give up on a student, to believe in ourselves enough, to trust ourselves enough to know that we can make the differences we wanted to make in student's lives when we started so many (or not so many) years ago? To not quit 5 minutes before the miracle.

To those of you who have been involved in Alternative Education for years or months, I say 'Welcome Home', and we see you. To those of you who have been involved in NAEA for years or months, I say "we thank you." And to those who have just joined us, I say, "Hello and... **What took you so long?"**

Most Sincerely yours,

KerriAnn Jannette-Hinkley
Region 1 Director NAEA
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