

## Emma Brown's Student Teacher Story 2023-2024

In the fall of 2023, I completed my general education student teaching placement. I was placed at Otsego elementary school in Grand Rapids, Ohio. I was assigned a fourth-grade classroom and had 24 students in my homeroom. I had six students that were on IEPs and because of my degree and experience with intervention, I really enjoyed helping these students to grow and learn.

I also taught ELA to 24 students, as well as science and social studies to 75 students. I could not have asked for a better experience. I was in a small rural school and got to know the entire staff quickly. Everyone was kind and welcoming. I feel that I learned not only from my mentor teacher but from the rest of staff members as well. I felt that I could talk to any staff member and ask for help if I needed it. I was confident in feeling that I was doing a good job because of the interactions and feedback I received from my mentor teacher, the other staff members, and administration.

This school also came with two dogs! One was a therapy dog named Callie, who was a golden retriever and followed the guidance counselor around. Our other dog was a school facilitator dog. Her name was Dana, and she was a black lab. I had never been in a school that had therapy dogs that were allowed to walk freely around the school building. The students absolutely loved having Callie and Dana around!

While I was at this placement, I felt that I was able to be independent. Once I learned the practices of the school plus, my teacher's expectations for her students, I felt confident in taking over her classroom. I took over her classroom in the 9th week of school. I was expected to plan and teach the entire day. I was also in charge of classroom management. This was a definite challenge for me! I had to figure out how to handle certain situations and making sure that my students understood my classroom expectations. I also had to make sure that they treated me as their **real** teacher, which was also a challenge!

My students often talked during transitioning. As a result, I came up with a PBIS reward system for the whole class. At the beginning of the week, I started the class with a certain number of tallies on the chalkboard. If anyone talked while transitioning, the entire class would lose a tally. If they made it to Friday with tallies left and before lunch, they would earn a reward we decided on for that week. As the weeks progressed and at the beginning of each week, the class would start with fewer and fewer tallies. My students acclimated fairly well to this reward system, and I was excited to see just how much they had grown over the semester.

I looked forward to coming to school every day and seeing my kids/students. I looked forward to hearing how things were going in their lives. I loved how much they wanted to learn and how engaged they were during my lessons. Science was by far the best! My first lesson with them was on the scientific method. We did a science experiment with exploding paper bags. They were so interested in learning the steps and how to apply them. They were curious about the world and wanted to ask endless questions to learn the **whys** of the world. I really enjoyed the content as well. I loved learning the topics in fourth grade myself. I felt that I not only was learning the ways of teaching but re-learning the content I was teaching, which I truly enjoyed.

One unexpected challenge I faced while student teaching was giving moral support to my mentor teacher. My mentor teacher's mother-in-law was in a home hospice situation because she had pancreatic cancer. I felt inadequate offering support to my mentor teacher through this difficult time. I also sometimes felt bad asking her questions or asking for help during this time. It did, however, help me to grow as an individual and helped me to be empathic. Along with this, I felt comfortable asking other teachers and staff for help when I felt alone. Her mother-in-law passed away the day of parent-teacher conferences. I nervously stepped in for her during the parent-teacher conferences. This was scary at first and required a lot of work on my part. After completing the evening of conferences, I felt that I was better prepared to be a teacher and was excited for my first year of teaching to begin.

I am thankful for this experience and its outcome. Overall, my student teaching experience, taught me so much more compared to what I thought I already knew about teaching. My mindset changed and as a result I chose to take on each and every challenge with an open mind and heart. I have grown so much and for this, I am so thankful and grateful. I also realized too, that I love...love to teach. I am truly excited to see where all of this will lead me after graduation.

I am so thankful for my time in Grand Rapids, Ohio!