I would like to share my story of why I became a Special Education teacher with you and how RESA is affecting my life today. I grew up in a large family with many aunts, uncles, and cousins. I have two cousins who I was always drawn to while growing up. I watched them grow up and am still amazed by their accomplishments today. I knew from a very young age that I wanted to do something with my life to make a difference in the lives of adults and children with disabilities.

My early adulthood got off to a rough start with career choices and college, but in the back of my mind I always knew what I ultimately wanted to do with my life, and that was to become a Special Education teacher. People would always say to me, “Why would you want to be a teacher? Teachers don’t make any money.” I didn’t care about the money and I would always tell those people that being a teacher is what would make me happy. In 2005, I began working at a group home as a Habilitation Assistant for a group of adult women with disabilities. In 2008, I became a nanny for a wonderful family with four children, one who had been diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy at a young age. While working for this family, I started my college career at the age of 25. Most people have graduated from college and have begun their careers by this age, but I was determined to graduate and pursue my dream. In 2011, at the age of 28, I graduated with my Bachelors from Cleveland State University. I have never seen my parents so proud of me as they were that day I walked across the stage. I will remember that day forever. I could finally begin my teaching career! I co-taught in a 5th grade Special Ed classroom at a charter school in the Parma area for three years and then taught in a self-contained K-2 ED classroom at a public school for two years. Along the way, I decided that one day in the future I wanted to teach Pre-School Special Ed. I would have to go back to school for that. I went on to get my Masters at Cleveland State University in 2015. I sacrificed part of my summer that year because I needed the Pre-K experience and it was required that I complete a second student teaching. I never thought in a million years I would be able to tell people that I have a Masters degree. It might not be a big deal to some people, but it is to me.

June of 2016, I received the worst news of my life. I was unsuccessful at passing one task of the Ohio Resident Educator program, my license would expire that month, and I would not be able to teach. Why is this happening to me? What have I done to deserve this? Something that I had worked so hard for was being taken away from me, something that I had earned. Maybe teaching really isn’t my calling. Those were the thoughts going through my head. I was devastated to say the least. I will remember that day forever too. Many days of mental exhaustion and crying during my summer off, which was supposed to be a happy time spent with my newborn daughter. I robbed my daughter of happy moments with me because I am upset every day. It is May 21, 2017, almost a year after I looked at that FAIL result, and I am still upset.

Because I was unsuccessful at passing RESA, in order to ever be able to teach in Ohio again, the requirements are to work as a substitute teacher for a year and enroll in a RESA college course. The short of it: I’ll have to do student teaching a 3rd time. I’ll have to provide lesson plans, assessments (even though those weren’t the tasks I was unsuccessful at), and be observed 4 times using the OTES rubric.  College? Again? I thought I was done with that. I think about RESA every day. I constantly think about what I did wrong. How can I be rated as a skilled teacher with OTES and not pass RESA? It just doesn’t make sense to me. I don’t understand how assessors who have never met me, worked with me, or even stepped foot in my classroom can determine my professional fate. Well in Ohio, they can, they did, and they will continue doing so. I’m not the only teacher in Ohio that lost their job and I won’t be the last. They need to have people fail or there would be no point. I fall into the 2% of educators who started the program the year it launched who were unsuccessful. The score reports that educators receive include the score on each individual task and extremely vague strengths/areas of weakness. How am I supposed to better myself as an educator if I don’t receive adequate feedback? If I gave my students feedback like we get, I wouldn’t have held my teaching position for 5 years. With the first attempt at RESA we were not provided a rubric and we received no feedback whatsoever on the score reports. It was either pass/not passed. My score report for one task on my second attempt revealed no strengths. A teacher with 4 years experience received no strengths whatsoever. How can I be allowed to teach for 5 years and then be told I’m not fully prepared to be a teacher? RESA changes on us every year. A new change for the 16-17 school year is that there are courses now being offered to educators with 1 or 2 unsuccessful attempts at RESA. Where were these classes when I was in jeopardy of losing my job? Resident Educators can now use artifacts from previous years, but up until this point you could only submit artifacts from the current school year. Each district works differently as far as mentors, facilitators, and program coordinators are concerned. Every school participating in RESA should abide by the same rules. I have heard from far too many people of the differences in support that districts provide to their resident educators. My district failed me. The state failed me.

It could be a vicious cycle for those who choose to jump through the hoops of the remediation year. A teacher who is unsuccessful a 4thtime will lose their license again, be ineligible for any type of license, and go back to working as a substitute and completing 3 hours of additional coursework. Who on earth would even want to teach at that point? I’ll put that into perspective for you: 6 years teaching experience plus a year of substitute teaching. Ohio can still say that you are not fully prepared to be a teacher. But… if you are one of those brave people that will be taking RESA for the 4th time, here’s a tip for you: you can **buy your way out on Teachers Pay Teachers website.**

My husband and I struggled with infertility for 2 years. That period of my life was emotionally and mentally exhausting and I never thought I would have to go through something that intense again. The situation that I am in today is just as emotionally and mentally exhausting as then. I went through a mental battle every day whether to stay in this or get the hell out. I love teaching and I want to teach, but I refused to jump through the ridiculous hoops that insult my education and teaching experience. My decision to end the remediation year was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made in my life. The last year I taught, I worked in one of the elementary buildings. When I started the remediation year, I was in the same district but working in the middle school building. The school had no idea what to do with me. I walked around the building aimlessly for hours. When they finally figured out where they were going to put me, I was working as a classroom assistant. On several occasions, administration would pull me out of the classroom I was in and stick me in study hall. Almost everyday, I was asked why I was in the building because people recognized me as an elementary teacher in the district. I was reminded everyday of the situation that I was in. I was absolutely embarrassed. There wasn’t a day that I didn’t cry. The decision to end the remediation year was one of the hardest decisions I’ve ever made in my life, but it wasn’t worth my sanity and happiness. Some days are easier than others, but I am still going through the grieving process.

Thank you for taking the time to read my testimony,

Kelly Turk