

Hi, my name is Brooke Hess and I have worked at Ivymount for over 6 years. I starting working at a special education placement program after holding multiple special education positions and student teaching in 2 Maryland public schools. As a certified special educator, people would ask me "Why do you work at at Ivymount, a school that could not pay near as much as a public school, have nowhere close to the same benefits while you even hold 2 special ed and 3 general education certifications and endorsements?" I would answer "because I love our students! Across my High School Chemistry class, my High School Algebra 2 class, and beyond, my students have brought me immeasurable joy and pride that I could not put into words AND within their least restricted environment.

However throughout my years at Ivymount, I have seen one teacher after another come to work there only to leave after their first or second year because the salary that special education placement program schools can pay is not able to compete with public school salaries. Thats not even considering the fact that some special education placement programs are 11 or 12 month programs. That means our teachers don't get a comparable public school salary OR summers off!? This leaves our students with a revolving door of staff who are qualified or staff who stay with less qualified backgrounds. How is that providing an APPROPRIATE education to our special ed students?

Our teachers show up every single day for our students like other special education placement program teachers and continue to provide incredible, specialized education and support that our students deserve. BUT just imagine the progress our students would make in achieving a high school diploma (yes, the same earned in typical high schools) or the progress made across their vocational classes that would allow them to obtain and keep a job IF we had the salary parity to retain highly qualified and certified teachers. Parents and caregivers spend years finding appropriate placements for their students. Our special education placement programs provide a level of support that public schools are not able to provide within their least restrictive environment. We then owe it to these parents, caregivers, but most importantly our students to retain the most qualified individuals for these students to reach their maximum potential.