Going to that state competition that really helped, but the really eye opening moment was last year when I wound up doing a competition and being an event manager. As a sponsor when we go to the conferences, we have to, of course as teachers, help facilitate the conference. You have to make sure you register. We run the competition. So as an event manager last year, I saw a special needs competition. “Wow, ok what is it?” It was Interview Skills and Job Seeking Skills. One is for of course your ‘normal student’. The Interview Skills was for the special needs students, but the rigor was the same. They still sat those students down in front of a panel of students and asked them very tough questions. Tell me what student can’t benefit from that. Tell me what student can’t benefit from the point of being able to compose themselves, being nervous, answering questions, dressing. The dress for the conferences is always business attire. They compete in business attire: their shirts, their ties, their blazers. You’re sitting down; you’re in front of a panel; you’re explaining yourself; you’re describing yourself; you’re talking about what you can bring to this.

They fill out an actual job application. They put together a resume. Those are skills that a lot of people don’t have now, adults. And it’s funny, again, from those business partners they told us that most of the people that come and apply for their jobs, 80% they throw the applications in the trashcan because they can’t follow simple instructions. And that’s amazing they can’t follow simple instructions, and here we have students going to compete just at doing these things and voluntarily. Because again, they don’t get a grade for it, what little prize money that they may win or scholarship money they are eligible for is not a whole lot, but it’s just the recognition of it, say, “Hey, you did great.”

Then, to see that for a special needs student, it was amazing. So this past summer, I went to Nashville for national competition and saw another area, personal care. Again, it may be labeled ‘special needs’, but the competitions are set up the same, the nursing assistant and then you have personal care. They’re labeled differently because again you want the competition to be even among special needs students; it’s fine, but when you looked at the rigor, again, they still had to do the same tasks. The standards did not change. I love that aspect because that’s the same way I’ve approached it as far as the principle of health sciences class.