Dear Krystal,

Congratulations on the new job as ESL and Migrant teacher. This will be quite a change from the four walls of room 206 in Bourbon County High School. Now, you will be walking from building to building much like your students have traveled from country to country—state to state. Like them, you’re looking for an experience that will be meaningful and uplifting. Truth is, your job now is to be a strong advocate, multi-subject teacher, and passionate coach you never knew you could be.

Many of your students have stories to tell of their experiences coming to the United States and their first encounters in our schools. Many teachers have no idea how to handle a student without a clear grasp of the English language. Assure teachers as an advocate that they do have what it takes and that you are there to make sure of it. In the classroom, use the cultures of your students as an asset to learn and experience various perspectives. Let the stories of your students be told in the words of poetry and lines of prose that give those students a sense of identity and pride for the adversity they’ve overcome. One of your students will write about crossing the Mexican border in the middle of the night with her sleeping sister in her arms. She hid under bridges, faced bandits trying to rob them, and went four days without rest. With your repeated words of affirmation, she will begin to understand the strength of her story.

More than just an advocate, you will also need to be a teacher of math, science, social studies, art, music, and health. Who knew that middle and high school heath would be so disgusting? It is. Go to classes and sit in the back for instruction to be reminded of the Pythagorean Theorem and be ready to help your students with homework. Most of your students do not have family at home who could help. You wouldn’t be able to if you hadn’t attended Ms. Lacy’s class. By the way, Ms. Lacy makes the most sense to you so tell her how amazing she is daily.

Most importantly, you are now an academic and life coach who needs to make weekly contacts with 45 students. Keep in mind that you must be humble and respectful of teacher’s time and bend to their wishes as you meet with students. Meetings should consist of a reflective moment, a current snapshot, and a futuristic goal to reach. Encourage students to be of voluntary service in the community and explain why grade point averages matter. They must work harder than their classmates to reach educational goals as many of them will not receive financial assistance in college. As undocumented students, they have to rely on savings or attain scholarships. The belief of this as a possibility is vital to their continued motivation in school. Show them examples of people who’ve walked where they are and continued to college and careers. It is never too early to dream of these futures.

Please continue to work with each individual with care and encouragement. Forgive the bad days and the harsh comments that often accompany anxious teenagers. With examples of success, lead students into their futures. Oh, and don’t forget to have a little fun too.

Sincerely,

Krystal