After graduating early from ECU, Becky Taylor '76, '80 is successfully impacting education

Many people take their time deciding what college they want to attend and what career they want to pursue, but Becky Taylor '76, '80 always knew that she would go to East Carolina University to become a teacher.

Taylor applied to ECU under early admission, finished in three years, and left her final summer courses a few days early to begin her first teaching job. From her first classroom in Edgecombe County to her current position as a Sylvan franchise owner and a member of the State Board of Education, Taylor has more than thirty-five years of experience in education. "I knew that I wanted to be a teacher from the time I was in first or second grade," said Taylor, who grew up in Edgecombe County. "I always knew that I would go to East Carolina University to become a teacher."

"I knew from the beginning that I wanted to go to ECU. My aunt and grandma both graduated from ECU. It was very easy for me to make that decision. I wanted to major in special education, and I knew ECU had a really good special education department. Being a special education teacher is the most rewarding position a teacher can have," Taylor's favorite professor was Betty Levy, who showed Taylor how to set up a structured, warm and caring teaching environment.

Taylor has many great memories of her time at ECU. "There were so many exciting times, like my first football game and my first class as a student teacher." While she enjoyed her time on campus, "I was ready to work. I couldn't wait to be a teacher," she commented.

"ECU prepared me for my career in a lot of different ways," Taylor said. "But the field experience truly prepared me for the classroom." Her first job was teaching exceptional students age eight to sixteen in Edgecombe County, where she spent four years. She taught in the Department of Special Education at East Carolina where she also supervised student teachers during their clinical placement in the schools.

"It is wonderful to come back and work at ECU," she commented. "I was in the same office with some of my professors."

"After hearing about the opportunity from a colleague, Taylor bought her first Sylvan franchise in 1988. She now owns a successful Sylvan franchise in Edgecombe County." Taylor said. "Sylvan teachers can have a really good special education department. Being a special education teacher is the most rewarding position a teacher can have. Then she accepted a position with ECU as a project director writing grants and working with at-risk students, including adolescent mothers and their children. She taught in the Department of Special Education at East Carolina where she also supervised student teachers during their clinical placement in the schools.

"It is wonderful to come back and work at ECU," she commented. "I was in the same office with some of my professors."

"I'm not looking at it just as a teacher or administrator or business owner. I can put myself in the shoes of all stakeholders and try to see each point of view."

"The biggest challenge is increasing teacher compensation and respect," Taylor said. "Teachers have so much passion; they know that it is worth it. It's a shame that people say, 'don't go into teaching because you can't make a living.'" Teachers really want to be respected.

"Taylor knows firsthand the impact that quality teachers can have. "It requires a lot of passion; they knew, as I did, exactly what they wanted to be. They said, 'I want to be a teacher.' That is one of our best assets." To me, ECU is number one in the state for preparing education professionals."

Thanks to her East Carolina education, Taylor has helped improve the lives of thousands of children in North Carolina.

Taylor has been serving on the State Board of Education since April 2013. "I love it! It's a lot of work, but it's very exciting," she said. "It requires a lot of communication with teachers and parents. I get to visit so many different schools and districts, which is so fun. It keeps me on the cutting edge."

As a board member, Taylor's goal is to have a positive impact on education in North Carolina. "Students are our future leaders," she said. "Times have changed, and we must be innovative. We need to prepare students for college or a career; they must be productive citizens."

Taylor's experience in the K-12 classroom, at the university level, and in the private sector give her a unique perspective on education.

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Early Bird Gets the Worm

After leaving the public schools, she served as the first educational vocational director at the Boys Club of Pitt County. Then she accepted a position with ECU as a project director writing grants and working with at-risk students, including adolescent mothers and their children.

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