



Hybrid Homeschooling Gives Families More Flexibility

‘It’s fabulous that families are being given more options’

By Ben DeGrow | July 2022

Tanya Armitage-Edgeworth’s daughter struggled with her private elementary school’s pandemic transition to remote instruction. Receiving unhelpful pushback from school administration, the family looked elsewhere. Tanya did not see full-time homeschooling as a viable possibility, given her background and professional responsibilities. Regular schooling options didn’t offer what her daughter needed to get back on track.

Then they learned about HighPoint Hybrid Academy. Today, Tanya’s daughter attends organized classes two days a week with other students her age at a rented church facility. Other days she ventures out on educational field trips, works from home on academic assignments or takes supplemental courses through Homeschool Connections. According to Tanya, her child is more engaged and motivated to learn than ever.

Most parents continue to enroll their children full-time in a district, charter or private school, making their own choices for a host of personal

reasons. But growing numbers are rethinking education at a different level, opting to combine classroom structure with the flexibility of homeschooling.

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Educational challenges that emerged during COVID have made clear what we should have seen all along.

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Nearly 70% of Michigan adults say our schools need to rethink how they educate. A return to normal is more likely to help many children thrive after the pandemic. But other students need a different approach, something that parents are best equipped to determine.

HighPoint opened its doors in 2017. Founder Lindsey VanDaele stumbled across hybrid homeschool programs in her online search for an educational option that would meet her son’s needs and allow her family more flexibility to spend time together. She ended up pursuing a plan that has benefited hundreds

more in her area. “It was a goosebump moment: This is what I’m supposed to do with my life,” VanDaele said. “If this is something that I want for my family, there’ve got to be other people who want this.”

The five years of the academy’s operation have brought tremendous growth, spurred recently by demand from students and parents who endured widespread COVID schooling frustrations.

Most of HighPoint’s teachers are certified, with experience in more traditional school settings, but they share the academy’s mission and prefer the less punishing schedule of hybrid schooling. Some work part-time at one location, while others work with two sets of students at two different locations to round out a fuller schedule.

That includes Angie Feeney, who is wrapping up her third year at HighPoint. She teaches art and social studies, working with more than 160 different students each Tuesday and Thursday. She left behind an instructional position at a public charter school for the freedom and flexibility of a hybrid program.

Lesson plans are shared online each Monday by 9 a.m., one example of the strong partnership HighPoint builds between parents and teachers. Feeney appreciates school leaders compensating teachers for extra planning hours. “Your time is valuable to them,” she said.

Feeney said she is ready to spend the rest of her professional career at HighPoint. The vast majority of students show eagerness to return from holiday or spring break, while both parents and teachers

express satisfaction with the balance they find in the hybrid model. “It’s fabulous that families are being given more options,” she added.

But some families have to sacrifice to pursue this flexible educational approach, if they can afford it at all. In order to provide a broad range of opportunities to Michigan students, parents need to be entrusted with more money and power to decide. The plan to create Student Opportunity Scholarship accounts represents the boldest available strategy to open the doors.

This policy would make a large pool of private donations available to families, who then could direct funds to cover a wide array of educational services. A dollar-for-dollar credit would encourage businesses and individuals to make donations that unleash creative grassroots solutions to children’s diverse academic and social needs. These scholarships could help break down barriers that hold many students back.

It’s time to give parents and educators more tools to craft effective educational opportunities for children. Working together, they can forge new paths to success.

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