Meeting Student Needs at Home

by Charlene Mabie-Gamble

y decision to home school my eleven-year-old son Joshua was not a choice made lightly. The past five years have been a constant struggle between the school system and myself. My son has been tested repeatedly since Kindergarten, but no concrete reason has been found for his inability to progress academically.

Testing at the end of his fourth-grade year placed him at a second-grade level in reading and comprehension. At my request, the Special Education Department "qualified" him to be put on educational assistance within his classroom.

The school assigned a tutor to help during class and spelling lists and tests were modified. Statewide tests, such as ISTEP, could now be read out loud, if needed. Despite these allowances, he failed statewide testing for the fourth year.

His grades remained in the 50-60 percentile. I requested further testing or a conference and was advised by the school social worker that I should accept that my son would never do better, and that he should continue to be passed along through grades so as not to impede his

Charlene Mabie-Gamble is a homemaker and mother of seven in Osceola, Indiana. She also volunteers for Elkhart City Emergency Management, a division of the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). social development. When I was told that he also probably would not pass the graduation exam, my hopes for my son's future sank.

The following year, he remained on modification status. He tested at only one grade below his current level, but failed statewide testing again. At this point, he was isolated academically from his peers and withdrew socially. All the years of futile struggle left him feeling inadequate. We were all at a loss.

This past summer has been spent researching educational options. I searched for statistics to measure how my school corporation stood nationally. I learned that more money is spent on prisons than on our children's education. Is it any wonder, then, that so many of our youth end up incarcerated? If our nation is more concerned with caring for the morally defunct than with the teaching of our children, there is good reason to worry about our future.

An educator with more than 30 years' experience compared my sons' work with other children at his grade level at my request. Although she based his work below grade level, she rated it as "within average range." She further elaborated that, due to the time spent on computers and television, the school corporations have had to become more lax in the expectations of students.

Shortly after this meeting, I decided to try alternative schooling. I spoke with home educa-

tors, read books, searched web sites, and looked into curriculum styles. I researched state requirements that only reinforced my opinion that the state takes the education of our youth lightly. The only requirements in Indiana for home or private education is that a student attend a set number of days, and that attendance records must be kept. No curriculum requirements are made.

I registered as a home educator with the state, requested my sons' records, and selected a



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curriculum. I organized our home school with a set schedule in every required subject to graduate. My goal was to offer my son the flexibility to learn on his own terms and then return him to public schooling before high school. Regardless of the route taken, however, my priority was to give him an education.

At the beginning of the year, Joshua was entering the sixth grade. As I have indicated, I did not begin this process with false expectations. Nonetheless, after the first week, I had to change my

curriculum to a lower grade level to meet his abilities. This was the first of many blows to my preconceived notions of home schooling.

The curriculum I chose came from a teaching store near my home. My son studies spelling, math, and writes in a journal daily. Language arts, reading comprehension, handwriting, social studies, and science are assigned one day a week. He usually completes daily assignments in an hour and a half. The first month went by rather smoothly. We worked together until I felt he had a grip on his assignments and the lesson plan. After this time, I became busy with other duties and left him to

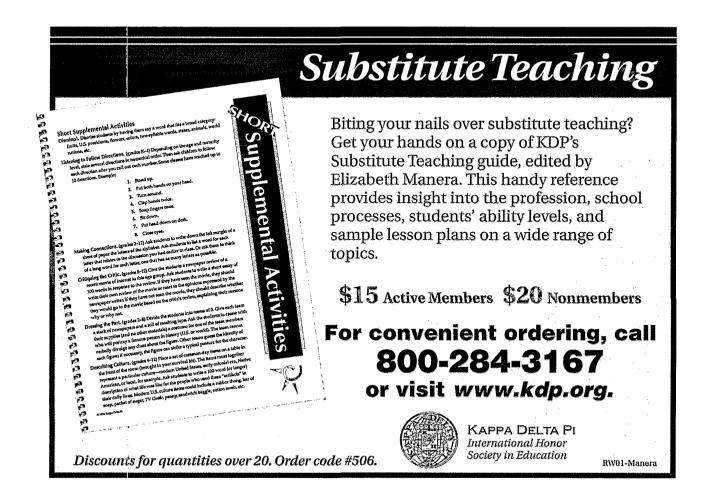
complete his work on his own. I graded his papers daily and recorded his progress. I suppose this arrangement left me with a false sense of security, because it was not long before I lost control of his assignments.

Recently, I learned that he had chosen not to finish all his assignments in the belief that I would not catch it. He is now two weeks behind in schooling. Unfortunately, we have found, through trial and mostly error, that we are not cut out for home schooling. I am too busy to give him the needed time and attention.

Joshua will be re-enrolling in school next semester. I have chosen not to return him to the

same school he left, because I still feel his education is compromised in that setting. We are currently looking into other options. I feel that home schooling is still a valuable way to educate children, but it also takes a commitment that we, unfortunately, were not able to make.

I do not regret my decision to home school my son. Though we learned it is not as easy as we had planned, we also learned a lot about each other and ourselves that we could not have known otherwise: if for no other reason. that learning has made this experience worthwhile. After all, not all of life's lessons are learned in school.





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