

Advice re: Working with schools to enroll in sports, single classes, or part-time

A: My experience tells me that each school is different in how it treats part-time students. We have experience with only one school, but certainly the tone (if not the requirements) has changed even when there has been a change of personnel, i.e., one vice-principal was quite different from his replacement. I have always found it expedient to go along with whatever they have asked. We are looking at a probable two-trips-to-school-a-day scenario for next year -- less than ideal!

A: Our experience being part-time homeschoolers at two different schools (elementary and middle in the same district) is that the school had great flexibility in what they chose to allow. I didn't think that they were held to any requirements until you got into high school, where there are specific league rules about being a student a certain percentage of the time for sports eligibility.

Ours had gaps in their schedule, and were allowed to work in the school library independently during that time, so as not to go back and forth. I will say that we worked with the school and the district admins for many years, and it was a process as they gained confidence that we knew what we were talking about when it came to our kids, and that crazy, creative scheduling could be successful. By the time we left, they were letting us pick and choose from the schedule, and even paying for online courses.

So, I think we ended up having an unusually positive experience. I would think at the elementary level, especially in a bigger school district, it's more likely you'd be bound by school board regulations, and might have to fight the battle at the district admin level.

A: I have little to add beyond these excellent comments. Some things come to mind. Can the 4 "class" requirement be finessed as a 4 "period" requirement? For example, math classes at our middle school are 2 periods. Is science one or two periods? Would that get you to 4 periods if the science schedule works?

Our school district said my son couldn't stay for lunch because it isn't a class (then, our vice principal actually asked my son if he wanted to stay for lunch, and that matter was solved). So, the "actual" answer isn't always initially apparent.

Would your son consider gym? Although it creates uncertainty for you, and I regret that, would it make sense to register him as a part-time student, see how the cards fall (i.e., fine arts, orchestra, maybe the science class will fall into place, maybe gym, and/or the school lets him stay for lunch)? Or, if the 6th grade science class doesn't fall in the afternoon (to mesh with arts and orchestra), when is 7th grade science and can your son be in that class?

Would you miss many Fridays at the middle school due to Friday Co-op? Would it be a positive or a negative to explain you planned on limiting your course load because the regular absences on Fridays would be a strain for teachers in many subjects, and what does the school suggest given this new "4 class" requirement.

Finally, I have the unique advantage of living across the street from the middle school. We have found many teachers who welcome students before and after school. If your son is "shut" out of a class, could you/he approach a teacher and explore whether he could "satellite" the class during regular hours or by coming in with work or questions before or after school? Sorry, I've given you more questions than answers.

A: [Our son] has attended our middle school part time for two years - 6th and 7th grade. It began because he wanted to participate in track and field. Our school had a requirement that he be in a class in order to participate. They suggested he be in choir because it was at the end of the day right before practice. It also doesn't have the same type of curriculum as a more academic class, so they didn't have to worry about grading. Turns out he liked the choir so much that he continued year round even when he didn't have a sport. They registered him as a student with only one class. He has no minimum number of classes that he had to take.

Our middle school has been very accommodating. They don't hold us to the May registration deadline that the state requires. The choir teacher is very accommodating and supportive of our homeschool schedules if he needs to miss. As to the grade requirement to participate in sports, the coach told me about it and told me I should notify him if there was a problem with his academic performance. We spoke about it once and never again.

As an earlier post I mentioned, I think so much of this is personality-driven. Both [my sons] have decided to go to middle school next year full time. The middle school math teacher worked with me to see what [one son] was doing and they placed him in a math 2 grade levels above his school grade. It was a very pleasant process.

[The other son] is in 8th grade and his math placement was much more rigid due to the fact that the high school would be teaching the class. The high school was not as flexible as the middle school. Again, personality-driven because

when I worked with the high school for my daughter, and it was a different math faculty member, and, they were much more accommodating to homeschool teacher input.

I would explore what the state law is regarding homeschool participation and see if that overrides an individual school's policy.

A: I agree, that it's personality driven, but it's also history-of-the-school-with-homeschoolers driven (or lack of). They aren't required by state law to give you access and you might be the first homeschooling family they've had? It might be good to ask the principal if they have had any homeschoolers in the past and find out the story.

I have been so happy to hear that L's experience has been so good with our school district, because five years ago when my daughter decided to try our high school full-time, she was the first homeschooler they had encountered in a *long* time! We were lucky in that my daughter was referred to the school by her college mentor, who had personal contacts at the school. We got to interact with a wider array of administrators whom we would not have otherwise gotten to speak to. It was clear that they had no idea what homeschooling was, and did not, at the outset, think highly of it. They acted like they were doing us a favor until they reviewed her file. As L. mentioned, taking all of the placement exams and doing everything they asked us to do, in addition to providing our own outside testing and having the recommendation of a professor (or in your son's case, music tutor or teacher), definitely helped change all of that. In the end, after a week and a half of classes when my daughter realized it wasn't for her, they were asking my daughter to stay--and offering part-time options that had not been open to her before. So, that's another path to consider--to sign up for everything they are asking and then see if you can drop things once they have gotten to know your son.

But even if the principal likes you, sometimes their hands can be tied by higher-ups, who have not had the personal interaction with you to know that you won't be a problem. My daughter, despite deciding to return to homeschooling, briefly thought about joining a club at the school when she was invited to join. She went and wasn't thrilled with it, but was surprised at the end of the first week (given their openness to continuing part-time classes), when they came back to us and said that as a homeschooler she wasn't allowed to participate in clubs. I was then told by the teacher involved--what he believed was the back story--that this had been a school board decision made years ago, because there had been a homeschooling family with children with behavioral problems--but he was sure if we went before the school board we could get the decision reversed. If my daughter wasn't so talented in math, I don't think we would have heard the story--the head of the club really wanted us to put our daughter in front of the board to get approval. By this point my daughter just wanted to be as far away from the school as possible :), so we didn't pursue it.

Talking with the principal in-person to get more of the story, and then possibly the school board, might be one way to go.

A: One thing we did when we approached our public elementary school in Dallas was to have our daughter take the TAKS test (Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills) at home. The previous year's test was available on the internet and it showed the school that our student was just as capable as their students, and therefore would not encounter any difficulties in the classroom that they would then have to deal with. Just an idea, if you encounter any issues with "academic progress" and sports. It's amazing how much weight schools place on these exams, but I don't know if Illinois puts their tests online.