

Chapter One:

Benefits of Co-ops

“When my children were saying their bedtime prayers, they thanked God for our homeschool co-op,” shared my friend Maren. “That’s when I knew we’d be coming back next semester.” Maren’s children knew that co-op was special to them. They enjoyed seeing their friends, learning from other parents and participating in their classes. Their mother also benefited from belonging to a homeschool co-op. She received encouragement, support, information and made friends, too.

There are many benefits of being a part of a homeschool co-op. Some are readily apparent, and some show up after many months of involvement as relationships grow. I have been a member of a homeschool co-op for five years and my most valued benefits have been the friends that I have made and their support of my homeschooling efforts. I’ve shared burdens, ideas, and laughs. Obviously, from its very name, a co-op (from the word “cooperate”) is a group of people working toward the same goal. I enjoy being with like-minded people once a week. It helps me to remember that I am not alone or isolated in my homeschooling experience.

Group Learning

One of the greatest benefits of belonging to a homeschool co-op is the opportunity for group learning. Many parents join a co-op simply to give their children some time in a group. Quite simply, children make friends at co-op. In my co-op, the students cannot wait for co-op day to arrive so they can see their friends. They may not realize it, but they can also benefit from learning from adults other than their parents. My daughters have been blessed to learn from talented, generous teachers. In addition, co-ops offer opportunities for group discussion and competitions.

Socialization

The most apparent benefit of a homeschool co-op is socialization. For years the homeschool movement has been criticized for the lack of opportunity to socialize. Critics believe that homeschooled children are isolated and need more interaction with their age-peers. The homeschool movement answers these critics in many ways. Sometimes we turn the question around and examine the unhealthy interactions occurring in many public schools. We proclaim that socialization is overrated and point out bullies, fights, disrespect, cliques, and so on as examples.

There are homeschoolers who are concerned about social interaction, and they seek out opportunities for their children to be a part of group activities. Thus we see the growth of homeschool sports leagues, classes, clubs, and of course, our focus, homeschool co-ops. These group activities balance the time spent learning alone or with the family. Most co-ops meet once or twice a week, therefore giving students a “taste” of group learning without being overwhelming.