



by Kyndra Steinmann

The questions pop up frequently in Facebook groups and real-life discussions with other homeschoolers. “I’m looking for a co-op. Do you know of one? What’s it like?”

The answer is: it depends on what kind of co-op you are asking about. Here’s a brief rundown on some of the basic types of co-ops out there.

Hybrid or Part-Time Homeschool Model

This type of co-op may be taught by parents but is often taught by a group of hired teachers. A number of classes will be offered in their entirety, in various subjects or for particular grade levels. Often the classes will meet either two or three days a week, and the students will have “homework” to complete on the “off” days. Usually these co-ops mainly provide classes for middle and high school students but some of them will also offer classes for elementary students as well. They tend to offer mostly science and math classes, but may also offer foreign languages, fine arts, or other classes as well.

The hybrid co-op is great for middle and high school students who need instruction in a particular subject that parents themselves feel weak on. It is also a great choice for years when homeschooling needs to

be moved somewhat off of mom’s plate due to family circumstances (the birth of a new baby, for instance) or for a child who needs to learn how to listen to and learn from non-parent teachers. It can also be a great choice for the accelerated student who isn’t ready for dual enrollment yet but needs some extra challenge.

Very little parental involvement is required beyond making sure students do their work, and it can be a good way to focus on a student’s level of responsibility before enrollment in a community college class or other educational opportunity.

Typically these co-ops don’t do well with students with severe learning or behavioral difficulties. Teachers are generally very good at their subject, but they may not have much sense of how to work with a highly energetic or easily distracted student.

Group Activities and Homeschool Field Trips Co-Op

This kind of co-op is wonderful for the early years of homeschooling! It gives the students a chance to do things with other children, forces Mom to leave the house for something besides grocery shopping, and is often more economical than visiting a museum or historic site as a single family. Activities can range from a monthly nature walk or art museum visit to a

weekly meet-up at a local playground or park for some group activities and games followed by free play.

Generally this type of co-op is organized by a group of moms working together, and most activities will be free or very low cost. The membership is frequently quite diverse, and people will tend to float in and out of the co-op as family circumstances dictate. Often these groups will run year-round.

The diversity and informality of the group means that children with learning or behavioral difficulties can often be included in ways that support their efforts to learn social skills. Because these groups don't usually have a strong vision or plan beyond some kind of group learning and socialization, they can be much more emotion-driven than a more academically focused group. Care of the relationships within the group will be important, and it is a good idea to ask from the outset what methods of conflict resolution the group uses for conflicts between children and between parents!

Homeschool Moms Teach Once a Week

Historically, I think, this has been the most common kind of co-op. Once a week, families gather for a day or a morning of various classes taught by moms (and sometimes dads) as the group sees a need for a particular subject or a mom has a desire to share her passion for something.

These co-ops are often able to be very accommodating to children with learning difficulties or social issues. Often the class participation is determined by ability rather than age or grade level and students are able to take the classes that suit them best rather than those that they "should be" taking according to their age.

Clear communication is a must in this type of co-op as the requirements and expectations for the students will vary depending on who is teaching and participants will need to both respect others' standards and be able to discuss issues that arise in

love and gentleness. A co-op of this type that involves as many people as possible in the planning and running of the enterprise will probably do a good job of communicating with parents and helping them to work together.

The Centralized Model (Classical Conversations, Catholic Schoolhouse)

This fourth model is relatively new. It might be called the "franchise" model of homeschool co-ops. In it a group of parents decide to use a particular curriculum together with other co-ops around the country. This usually means that there are plenty of resources available as the projects developed by teachers in Texas are available as inspiration at least for teachers in Virginia. Many times the "central office" will provide regular (even week by week) support for co-ops in the form of blog posts, downloads and other materials.

Because these co-ops are all over the country they would be a great choice for a family that moves frequently or is thinking of moving since the new co-op would still be the same curriculum-wise.

Depending on how the central office runs things the local co-op may not have much flexibility in what is offered or in what order things are taught.

As you can see there are co-op organizations out there for almost any need! The important thing is to plug in and do your part in whatever kind of co-op you choose! Of course if what you are looking for doesn't exist in your area you can always start something.

This article originally appeared on the website of Home Educators Association of Virginia heav.org and is used with permission.

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