

Some Thoughts On Our Educational Model From the New Hope Director

by Joan Smith

“So tell me--is New Hope going to be a school when it grows up?” Over the years, I have heard this question, or versions of it, numerous times. My answer is always the same: an emphatic “NO.” Why? While school has taken many forms throughout history, in our culture and time the word “school” has come to denote something very specific with its own equally specific nomenclature. When we hear the word “school,” we can’t help but picture a building where students are taught by “teachers” for five to six hours a day, five days a week, in age-segregated “grades” and, for older students, “classes” for different subjects. Other, and possibly more important, realities of “school” include educators and administrators who determine what a child will learn over the course of twelve years of schooling, how and when they will learn it, and the methodology that will be used to assess how *well* they have learned it.

New Hope does not fit this traditional model of American education. Our goal—indeed, the very reason we exist—is to support homeschooling, a very different model of education. Consequently, we have created an “educational hybrid,” a model that seeks to preserve the very best of homeschooling while recognizing the advantages of corporate learning under the guidance and direction of a person knowledgeable in their field.

What is this “very best of homeschooling” that we seek to preserve? We believe the best of homeschooling is found in its emphasis on the importance of parent, home and family. As homeschooling parents, we would all agree that it is *our* responsibility, not the responsibility of professional educators and administrators, to choose the content and progression of our child’s education, and that it is *home and family*, not the school, that should play the dominant role in the intellectual, moral and spiritual development of our young people. By offering a menu of small-group tutorials that meet just two days a week, New Hope preserves these key roles of parent, home and family while providing a valuable corporate learning experience in which the student is accountable to an instructor.

You may ask, “But, really, is nomenclature *that* important? Why not call New Hope a ‘school’ where students take ‘classes?’ Have you ever tried to find that one word to describe New Hope?!? ‘School’ is so convenient! What’s the big deal?” Our Board of Directors and I would say that it *is* a big deal, that words influence the way we think about New Hope and how we envision the future. If we want to remain a distinctive educational model with a very unique purpose, then we must define ourselves with words that support that uniqueness rather than words that would lead

us in a very different direction. Judging from your enthusiastic response to New Hope over the years, we're confident that we are meeting a very real need among homeschoolers.

We want to continue meeting that need, and that means being vigilant about preserving the very distinct nature of our educational model, and *that* means choosing carefully the words we use to describe New Hope. We must also remember that we have a public presence, and the words we use to describe New Hope to outsiders must present a clear and distinctive picture of who we are. We are proud of who we are and believe that New Hope has become a valuable educational alternative for parents in our area. Hence, our zeal for protecting and preserving what we are.

So if you happen to use the word "school" in the presence of our tutors or myself, don't be surprised if you receive a gentle correction. Of course, *we* don't always get it right, either, so feel free to correct *us* if we slip! And if you're asked, "what is New Hope?" try this: "New Hope is a unique educational model that supports homeschooling," and then go on to describe *how* we do that. It's not a simple, one-word answer like "school," but I guess that's the price we pay for being "unique."