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Lauren Rogers helps her sister, Katie, with her schoolwork. Katie is taught at home while Lauren attends Holley Junior/Senior High School. (J-R Photo by Karen Sampson)

Home schooling is the new choice

By KAREN SAMPSON

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ALBION – After “a lot of soul-searching,” Susan Rogers made the decision to bring her daughter home for school.

Rogers’ family is hardly alone in Orleans County. In the Albion Central School District, 30 families have opted to home school their children. It is an option gaining in popularity.

Laurie Lindsay teaches four of her five children at home after her oldest, now a student at Monroe Community College, came home from school one day and asked her parents to instruct her themselves.

“It was like a light went off,” Lindsay said. “Now I think it was the Lord, divine intervention. Before I had been apprehensive. But I thought, yeah, I could do that.”

Ada Grabowski, assistant superintendent at Albion Central, said the district encourages parents to be active in their children’s academic lives and supports parents who choose home instruction for their families.

“I think this is a great option for families,” she said. “We owe it to our families to give them options. My experience with has been very positive. They’re very bright, very goal-orientated people. You’ve got to be to teach your kids.”

Rogers decided to teach Katie in second grade when her daughter began to have social problems at Holley Elementary. While doing well academically, Katie was fighting shyness and insecurity around her classmates. Katie’s brother, Jeffrey, is in the first grade and also studies at home. Their older sister, Lauren, is a student at Holley Junior/Senior High School.

“They get a lot of one-on-one teaching,” Rogers said. “Because we’re working on their school work in a concentrated manner, we get it done very quickly and play with each other and go on field trips.”

Jeffrey is beginning to read, Rogers said, and finds it difficult and frustrating. Working with her son individually has been helpful, she said, because she is familiar with his strengths and weaknesses, and knows when he feels ready to quit.

“We’re trying to get him into a situation where he enjoys learning,” Rogers said. “He needs a lot of re-directing and one-on-one. I said if that’s what he needs, that’s what I’ll give him.”

In preparing the course of instruction for her children, Rogers said she tries to follow the curriculum planned at the public school and utilizes a number of resources.

“We filled in the gaps from a number of friends who home school,” she said. “We have gotten books from friends, catalogs, book sales. We use a lot of library books to supplement what we have at home. I tried to follow what the public school does, with math and reading goals. Since my oldest has been in public school all her life, I know what they’ve done.”

Rogers said her family belongs to a local home school cooperative and participates in special activities with the other children who belong.

The most important affect has been an increase in Katie’s self-confidence with her academic success.

“Katie had a lot of fears and anxiety when I pulled her out,” Rogers said. “She’s more self-confident now. It’s definitely brought us closer together as a family.”

Rogers met with Katie’s teacher and inquired about the curriculum and how she needed to go about filing with the school district to home school Katie in order to get started.

“After that, it was sitting down with the books and deciding which chapters we’d cover what weeks and which field trips we’d take,” she said. “With Jeffrey it was easier because we had a curriculum in place. So I just plugged him into the curriculum Katie was doing, supplementing it with math and reading.”

Lindsay’s oldest children were students at Golden Heights Christian School in Brockport when she and her husband, the Rev. Tim Lindsay, decided to teach them at home. They have been instructing at home for six years now.

“I think it’s been great, I really do,” Lindsay said. “There have been many pros and cons. I think it keeps us closer together as a family; we’re not as scattered.”

Lindsay uses the Abecka curriculum, a Christian faith-based program that was also taught at Golden Heights.

“You follow the guide for each day.” She said. “You can adjust it to what they need. With the number of kids we have, I still pretty much follow the curriculum.”

There is still flexibility with following an outline, she said. Her children are often able to pursue different subject areas that interest them.

“My one son will just take off and do a science project on his own,” Lindsay said.

Lindsay said her family works together in following their instruction. The older two children follow an outline their mother prepares for their morning lessons while she works individually with the young two. In the afternoon she reviews their progress.

“Every Friday we get together in the cooperative and do art, music, gym and what we call life skills,” Lindsay said.

Tiffany, who is in the 10th grade, started elementary school at Golden Heights and attended ninth grade there. She still keeps in touch with some of her friends. “I like being home schooled better,” she said. “Here I get more one-on-one. I spend more time with my mom. At Golden Heights it was a lot harder to get the one-on-one.”

Tiffany said she is planning to attend college and may major in elementary education. She said she doesn’t think her home-based education will have an effect on her career choice.

“When I was at Golden Heights, I would go down and help with the little kids,” she said. “I love kids, so I think I would have a lot of fun doing that.”

The option for home instruction is provided for in the state commissioner of education’s regulations, Grabowski said. Families must submit individual home instruction plans and follow state and district regulations on attendance, days of instruction and subjects studied. From there, she said, district guidelines and assistance vary.

Grabowski said families’ instruction plans are reviewed by the superintendent of schools before schooling begins.