

## FITTING IN

### Students

Mercy welcomes home-schooled students in new part-time program

### Justin Murphy

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Christen Ketchum could easily have taken pre-calculus as part of her home-schooling curriculum; plenty of online courses exist, and there are co-ops where students learn together.

To create regression lines by tossing Barbie dolls off a balcony and measuring the recoil on their rubber band bungee cords, though, requires somewhat more structure.

That's what she was doing last week at Our Lady of Mercy School for Young Women in Brighton, which recently became the first large private school in the Rochester area to accept home-schooled students on a parttime basis. The school and families say it fills a need for students who prefer home-schooling but need a school setting for some specialized classes.

"It's nice to have a teacher to ask questions instead of looking things up online, and there are other girls I can bounce things off of," Ketchum said. "It's just cool to have different teachers to interact with, and different students."

Ketchum became Mercy's first home-schooled student earlier this year, taking pre-calculus and French. Another girl, seventh-grader Ava Papadakos, is taking

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**Seventh-graders Charlotte Shields-Rossi and Ava Papadakos, who is home schooled, receive instruction during a French class from teacher Kim Vita at Mercy. The high school has accepted home-schooled**

**students in part-time classes, which is new in the area for big private schools. CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**



**Though home-schooled, 11th-grader Christen Ketchum attends a pre-calculus class at Mercy, seen here looking at her laptop and sitting behind 11th-grader Karis Kalley. CARLOS ORTIZ/@CFORTIZ\_DANDC/STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER**

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French now and will add art and science next semester.

“I’ve blown up too many test tubes in my kitchen and started too many fires, so I’d like to find her a (science) class,” Papadakos’ mother, Susan Dantoni, said. “I saw the advertisements for Mercy and thought, ‘Why recreate the wheel?’ “ Public schools are not allowed to accept homeschooled students on a part-time basis, and other large private and parochial schools in the Rochester area aren’t doing it, though The Harley School accepts some home-schooled students during the summer. Some smaller ones, including the Charles Finney School and Rochester Christian School in Penfield, accept homeschooled students on an occasional basis. At Mercy, the students can take up to six classes per semester, paying a pro-rated portion of the annual tuition. They cannot play sports, and the school only offers courses where space is available in existing classrooms.

“Home-school families are often drawn to our environment, but they’re not always able to make the full-time school commitment,” Mercy Director of Admission Mary Cannon said. “We’re just trusting that as families discover us and realize what a positive experience we offer, they’ll be interested in joining us.”

There are about 1,700 home-schooled students in Monroe County, according to the most recent available state data, about 700 of whom are in grades 7-12. Several options exist for more specialized or resourceintensive courses such as science labs, foreign language or art.

Some students in higher grades take courses at local community colleges. Several home-schooling families can band together and hire a tutor. There are also online options.

Mercy believes it is one of the first private schools in the country to offer part-time enrollment to home-schooled students on a formal basis.

Dantoni began homeschooling because her older son was a high-level figure skater who traveled to compete. She continued to do so with Ava, her younger daughter, but wanted a more immersive experience for her in foreign languages in particular.

“My son became good at reading and writing French, but he had a harder time with (speaking and listening),” she said. “We got him a tutor, but it wasn’t enough. I wanted to make sure Ava was not lacking in communication in conversational French.” Ava Papadakos said it took a few weeks to get used to schoolhouse conventions such as raising your hand and asking permission to use the bathroom. She loves being in class with other girls, though — so much so she’d like to attend Mercy full-time.

“At first I was scared I wouldn’t be able to catch up, but it wasn’t that hard to, and it’s been very fun,” she said. “I like it a lot.”

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