



Why KAT does not Participate in Public School Partnerships

The KAT parent agreement states that “KAT as an organization does not participate in any way with public school partnerships.” KAT families agree not to pay any KAT tutor fees using any government or partnership funds.

Let us take a brief look at what public school partnerships are, what their impact could be on homeschoolers, and what this means for KAT and KAT families.

What are public school partnerships?

Public school–homeschool “partnership” programs are unique to the State of Michigan. While many states have equal access provisions allowing homeschooled students to access public school resources, Michigan’s constitution contains a 1970 amendment which prohibits the funding of “nonpublic” education.

In response to several Michigan supreme court decisions, the Michigan Department of Education has developed the public school partnerships. Students enroll in those partnerships on a part-time basis in “nonessential elective courses provided by a public-school district.” Families who participate in these programs receive financial assistance for certain classes or educational materials. The schools’ motivation for offering partnerships is that they can count participating homeschool students as at least partly enrolled which increases state funding to the school district.

What could be the impact of these public-school partnerships on KAT?

The KAT Parent Handbook states that “KAT is a parent-facilitated, Christian co-op where Christian tutors provide a wide variety of academic classes . . . Tutors challenge, stimulate and encourage students in their academic, spiritual and social growth, while parents remain as the core educators who assist their children with weekly KAT assignments.”

This focus on a Christian environment and on parents as core educators is especially important to the PAC and to the Board. We are concerned that KAT families’ affiliations with public school partnerships could limit how tutors, students, and parents can express their Christian faith.

Let me share a couple of recent examples of what this could look like.

In Alberta, Canada, homeschoolers and private schools have received government vouchers for homeschooling curriculum and activities for many years. During this time, the government imposed almost no extra requirements imposed on them. But in 2016, in a draconian move, the Albertan government has mandated that all schools (including homeschoolers and private schools who take government money), must teach a transgender / LGBT curriculum. As a result, the two largest private schools, who had thousands of homeschooling families under their umbrella, were both shut down by the Canadian government. That means all those families are now homeschooling illegally.

You might think this could not happen in Michigan where we have one of the most generous homeschool laws. In October 2017, families of a local Kalamazoo group involved in partnerships

were informed that classes with theological teaching, Scripture memory, prayer, etc. would not qualify for funding from the homeschool partnerships. To comply with this order, prayer was taken out of the classes and scheduled prayer to take place in the Gym before most class sessions.

Even though parents think of public school partnership money as "scholarships" - the result is that families who specifically pay for a faith-based educational experience are having that taken away even if only a single family uses state money to pay for their class. When public money is involved, religious activity or instruction are not permitted.

KAT's Statement of Faith clearly states that KAT is a Christian organization. Not being able to pray or share our faith in our classes goes directly against the Christian nature of KAT.

Here's the catch: Because tutors pay rent to KAT, there is the risk that if the state chooses to interpret our process of tutors who have partnership-funded students paying rent to KAT as "KAT receiving public funds." Thus, we may be opening ourselves to state regulations which could mean taking prayer out of the classrooms and toning down the Christian worldview shared in our classes.

Besides these impacts for KAT, partnerships could have other negative impacts for KAT and homeschooling families throughout Michigan:

- Increased homeschool participation in public school partnership programs creates the potential for increased regulation of all homeschooling families, not just those enrolled in a partnership.
- In turn, increased reporting requirements would necessitate a change in state law which would not be in the best interest of Michigan homeschoolers.
- The number of homeschool co-ops and support groups are dwindling. This is partly due to partnership groups because many parents no longer feel a need to be a part of a private group or co-op.

KAT acknowledges that public-private partnerships is an issue on which are strong feelings on both sides. We hope you understand why KAT had to take the position we are taking.

At the same time, we ask you to respect each family's choice to determine what is best for their children – that is what homeschooling is all about.

Sources

MICHN (Michigan Christian Homeschool Network – formerly INCH)

Public School Partnerships — The Parable of Two Roads

<https://www.inch.org/public-school-partnerships-parable-two-roads>

<https://katutorsit.wixsite.com/katsite>

HSLDA (Homeschool Legal Defense Association)

What about Michigan's "homeschool partnerships"?

<https://hsllda.org/content/hs/state/mi/201706090.asp>
