

Insight into a student's life

Insight School teaches responsibility, offers flexibility.

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School's been in session at Grantsburg's Insight School for months now, so what makes the Insight student's school day different than that of a conventional student.

The Insight School may be headquartered in Grantsburg, but the students enrolled in it come from throughout the state.

Just as a Siren resident might choose open enrollment in Grantsburg, these students have chosen to open enroll in the Insight School.

Reaching students from such a wide geographic area is made possible through online technologies which enable students, teachers, and mentors to engage in interactive learning while seated at their home computer.

These students come from a variety of backgrounds and have chosen to enroll in the Insight School for a number of reasons.

Some chose Insight in order to access classes not available at their own school, others have selected it as an alternative to the home schooling in which they were engaged, and for some students with jobs, the freedom from the regular school day offers the flexibility needed to accommodate their busy lives.

For 15-year-old Emma Foss of Osceola, the decision to enroll in the Insight School was made as an alternative to the home schooling from which she had previously been learning.

"My dad thought it would be nice to try something new and see if it worked better than home schooling," she explained.

"At first, I was like 'Yeah okay,' then I thought about it and didn't want to do it that much, so he had to talk me into it again, but I'm glad he did."

So what is Emma so glad about?

For one, a degree of flexibility not afforded students attending public school. While students are rushing to their classrooms before the bell rings, Emma can be still sleeping or already working, depending on her whim.

"You get to be at home and do schoolwork when you feel like it. If you don't feel like doing it at 7 a.m. you can do it at 5 p.m. And you can go places during the week - you can always go somewhere else and do your schoolwork if you have a computer," Emma said.

But it wasn't always this simple, and especially at the beginning of the school year it took Emma some time to make the transition from home school to Insight School.

"At first it was pretty hard figuring out how to hand everything and in knowing what work you had to do every week.

"It took me a while to develop a routine, I really just started to get it down a month ago," she said.

And her secret?

"I just do the work when I feel like it. I know that if I don't finish it on time I'll get in trouble with the teachers and then with my parents. And usually there's nothing else to do during the day, so it just makes for something that has to be done.

"Usually I check to see what to do for the day and I do that. If there are a bunch of things I do history, health, and science in that order - hardest to easiest. You're pretty much on your own."

Emma doesn't just work her way willy-nilly through her subjects (history, health, science, math, physical education, and English) however, as the Insight School provides a schedule of online classes which students attend, albeit remotely.

In order to prepare for the virtual class, students visit their online calendar and check to see what the required reading is for the session.

Then, having completed the reading, they go to work on an assignment relating to the section they just read. And then by the time for class, each student will hopefully be prepared, having the reading and homework completed.

"For the live classes you can go into one [voice chat] room with your students and teachers. You can actually talk, you have a little headset and microphone," she said.

During these live classes, students are able to verbally discuss the assigned reading and homework with both classmates and the teacher, and hopefully have any questions they may have answered.

In addition to live classes, students also engage in written question and answer sessions amongst one another via message boards.

"They also do discussion boards in classes and you are always required to respond to two different people," she said.

And should a student need help after all of this, an instructor is always just an email or phone call away.

"The teachers are also pretty easy to get a hold of, I usually contact them by email, but I believe there's a way you can call them, although I haven't needed help right away on anything where I needed to call them."

In addition to the assistance they receive from teachers, students are also assigned an "iMentor."

"The iMentor really helped," Emma said of her attempts to understand the Insight system during the early months.

So what's an iMentor?

"It's a person who calls you and makes sure everything is going okay," she explained. "And if you have any questions, you can always call them, and they help you figure things out."

And things are often done a little bit differently at the Insight School. Take for example Emma's physical education class. While she can't be watched over by a gym teacher, the class employs a number of techniques to get students active, and to expand the experience beyond just physical activity.

"You have a log that you are required to hand in every week, and you have to have at least three hours of activity over three different days."

"You also have to talk with classmates. It's like a little quiz, the teacher gives you a quiz you have to work on, asks you questions, and helps you set goals. So the log you turn in every week tells her if you've improved on anything."

Thus while it sounds like a student at the Insight School is pretty well covered academically speaking, there is also the social aspect of high school - a facet of growing up which the Insight School goes out of its way to foster.

"I do think they encourage you to socialize because they do the little discussion boards in classes and always make you respond to at least two different people, plus they always give you time after the class to voice chat with your classmates."

Besides the interaction which instructors encourage within the academic context, the Insight school also offers a variety of avenues for students to collaborate in activities outside the classroom.

"I don't feel like I'm missing out, because they offer all the public school things after school - they have lots of clubs you can join if you want to, like photography club and DI."

And what does Emma want to do?

"I want to be in DI, Destination Imagination," she said. "You have a group of people and you have to work together to do a 20-minute skit. You do all your own costumes, and at the end of it you go to a tournament - if you win there, you get to go on to compete in Milwaukee."

Some students aren't just looking beyond the end of the school day, they're looking beyond high school towards college. And the Insight School also has programs in place to accommodate them.

"After I graduate I'm thinking of becoming a chef," Emma said. "They provide a college prep program where you tell them what you want to get there and they help you do what it takes to get there and achieve that goal."

With all of this and more to offer, should it come as any surprise, then when Emma rates the Insight School experience above both home and public school?

"I think it's better than home school because you get to interact with more people, and I think it's better than public school because you're not around all of the bad things that happen, but you still get to see what other peoples' points of view are on things.