

Quarterly Magazine  
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# VALLEY parents

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## Academic Support Beyond the Classroom

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explicitly. To expect a middle schooler to know how to write down a long-term assignment, finish it in the appropriate time and then turn it in, that might be asking an awful lot. So we work with those students to break it down into chunks and to know how to ask for help.”

In addition to providing homework support and direct instruction to students in their offices, Szabo said Stern teachers also support students within the school environment itself. “It’s a collaborative effort between the parents and the school and the Stern Center instructors to have a team approach for these students,” Szabo said. “Some parents contract with us to provide a service for their child during the school day, during a study hall or a block that might be free for them. The school may put the child on an (individual education plan), but the parents want to offer as much support as they can to supplement the instruction

that’s going on during the school day.”

None of these services come free, of course, and the starting fee of \$86 per hour may scare many parents away. Szabo noted, however, that scholarships are available and parents should not assume that financial assistance is not available.

### PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT AT KUMON

Therese Linehan, owner of Kumon Math & Reading in Norwich, wanted to make one point absolutely clear. “I have enormous respect for teachers and parents engaged in the learning process in the classroom,” Linehan said. And she’s not alone. This was a sentiment shared by every educator contacted for this article. Still, Linehan said she sees myriad ways in which small, incremental changes in contemporary life inevitably lead to teachers, support staff and parents having less time in the day to develop their students’ basic academic skills.

“Think about it,” Linehan said. “The kids have a lot more

specials in school now than they used to and families are busier than ever.” It’s all good stuff, Linehan conceded — soccer, art, music, crafts, ballet, archery, you name it. But with parents struggling just to find time when everyone in the family can sit down to an actual dinner and teachers covering everything from good dental hygiene to multiplying fractions, it makes sense that parents may turn to a learning center such as Kumon to make sure their children set aside some time each day to practice basic skills.

The good news, according to Linehan, is that a little bit of time goes a long way.

“I have to convince (parents) to commit to a long-term program” that will cost \$110 a month, Linehan said. But once they come on board, the only time commitment the Kumon program asks from its students, and by extension their parents, is a total of about two hours each week. It breaks down to two 30-minute sessions at the center, locat-

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## Need a Tutor? Help Is at Hand, Both in Finding a Suitable Match and Knowing What to Expect for Your Investment in Time and Money

By DIANE TAYLOR

Valley News Staff Writer

Learning centers such as Stern, the Center for School Success and Kumon can fill an important need in a student’s life. But there may also be times when what is needed is the additional academic support that can best be provided by a tutor.

But parents who have ventured into the virtual wild west of the Internet in hopes of finding a suitable tutor might be forgiven if they took one look and decided to run away. Even a casual glance on tutoring websites, such as wyzant, care.com or sittercity, may leave parents feeling more shaken than reassured. On sittercity in particular, a few tutors’ pages read more like personals ads than professional resumes. But even the tutors who seem to have solid academic qualifications raise the question: When dozens of tutoring services pop up before one’s eyes in an instant, how is one supposed to intelligently sort through the possibilities?

Andrew Richman, a former high school math teacher, might just have the answer.

When Richman left the classroom to become a stay-at-home father, he took up tutoring in order to keep his teaching skills sharp. When the Hanover resident quickly discovered that he had more business than he could handle, he expanded his operations and brought in more math tutors to help out. Soon enough, Richman said in an email, “people started asking me if I had tutors in other areas. They wanted someone with a background in education whom they could trust to wade through the crowd for them and pick out the right tutor.”

As the owner of Upper Valley Tutoring, Richman said



Rachel Hochman, right, is a former botanist and college academic advisor who started her own tutoring business when she realized she missed working with students one-on-one and also wanted to work independently of an institution. Helping students to master a particular subject matter is important, Hochman said, but guiding them to become independent learners is her ultimate goal.

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF RACHEL HOCHMAN

now that’s basically all that he does. “I spend my time finding, screening and supporting tutors, and listening to what students need, matching them with the right tutor and monitoring the match.”

Working through an agency such as Richman’s may be just the extra bit of help that parents need, provided they can afford rates that range from \$20-\$65. But should they choose to go it alone in their search for a tutor, Richman suggested they start by looking close to home. Most schools maintain a list of tutors, and Dartmouth College and the Upper Valley Listserv may also be good sources of additional help. The one drawback, Richman said, and this goes for online searches as well, is that none of these tutors may have been screened, so it will be the parents’ responsibility to determine whether or not a tutor is a good match for their child.

Parents should “think carefully about what (they) want and decide what qualifications (they) require,” Richman said. And even if they have found a good match, parents should monitor their child’s progress, keeping in mind that “sometimes kids fall into a rhythm and do not ask themselves if the work is really helpful.” So parents need to check up on them regularly “to be sure they are not wasting money” on tutoring fees that can run anywhere from \$12-\$60 an hour.

Richman also encouraged parents not to be afraid to change tutors if they feel that the person they hired is not living up to expectations. “There are wonderful tutors out there who know the material, can communicate it effectively and relate well to students,” Richman said. “If your tutor is not doing all three, find someone else.”

### TUTORING AS A PROFESSION

Woodstock resident Rachel Hochman didn’t start out to become a tutor. Trained as a botanist with a master’s degree of the University of California-Davis, she was working on her doctorate in plant ecology at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill when she needed some extra money and took a position advising undergraduate science students. Working eight hours a week, Hochman found herself responsible for providing academic advice to upwards of 250 students. It was a bit of a grind, Hochman said, but she loved the work. “I felt very fulfilled,” she said, so much so that she left the doctoral program and hired on as a full-time adviser, with more than 1,200 students under her direction.

Advising became Hochman’s career, taking her to Oregon State to advise students in an honors program and eventually to Sterling College in Craftsbury Common, Vt. But when her husband decided to return to school to become a dentist, Hochman said she had to figure out what to do next. The satisfaction she gained from working with students one-on-one stuck with her, and in Morgantown, W. Va., in 2003, she hung out her shingle as a tutor under the business name of Wiseguide Tutoring

and Mentoring.

As with her unexpected career change to advising, Hochman discovered a love for tutoring, thriving again on the close and direct interaction that comes from working with one pupil at a time. When she relocated to Woodstock in 2007, she brought the tutoring business with her and set up shop again.

These days Hochman said her clientele is made up primarily of elementary and middle school students whose parents generally find their way to her through word of mouth. The students themselves, she said, tend to fall into one of two categories. Either the child is “high achieving and needs extra challenging intellectual work outside of the classroom, or the child has some difficulties, whether it’s with math or reading or written expression.”

Students who come to her with more profound learning disabilities, especially in respect to reading, Hochman said she refers to local learning centers or recommends an actual reading specialist.

Setting academic goals and determining how long she will work with any particular student, Hochman said, is one of the more challenging aspects of her profession. The results parents are looking for may be difficult to achieve given the limited amount of time each week that she spends with the student and the extent of the academic weakness. “We may be correcting a problem that began six years ago,” Hochman said, and her overarching goal of creating a nonjudgmental environment where children are liberated from the pressure to perform on cue may not always jibe with parental expectations.

That doesn’t mean parents should not expect positive, quantifiable improvements for their children, Hochman said. She never begins a course of study with a student until she, the parents and the students themselves have reached an agreement on the goals they will be working toward attaining. But even if the academic objective is something as straightforward as helping a child memorize her multiplication tables or write a coherent essay, Hochman always has a bigger picture in mind.

Her ultimate aim, Hochman said, is to provide enough support so that each and every student who avails himself of her services can go on to become an independent learner not only at school but in all areas of his life.



Andrew Richman started Upper Valley Tutoring after he became a math tutor himself. He quickly realized that parents need help finding the right tutor to meet their child’s needs. He now spends his time, he said, “finding, screening and supporting tutors.”

PHOTOGRAPH COURTESY OF ANDREW RICHMAN