



SHARON TODD CHECKS herself when the subject of “advanced placement” high school classes comes up. But it is clear she doesn’t like the concept, doesn’t like the fact that students take “pretend” college classes, and then go off to college to take the same class a second time. And have to pay for the privilege.

Not so at Todd Academy, a truly unconventional educational program newly relocated into a historic Lockerbie Square building at the corner of East and New York streets.

The school defines itself as “a small early college high school tailored to academically motivated students who wish to either take an accelerated high school program of college classes or start college early on a part-time or full-time basis.” Todd services are also used by home-school parents who are trying to keep their children working ahead of a normal high school curriculum.

“There is nothing about us that is traditional,” said Todd, who became an educator in 2002 when she decided to home-school her oldest daughter, then 14. The success was immediate. (That daughter, by the way, is poised to graduate from Ball State University this spring with a 3.9 grade-point average.) The next year, nine students wanted the same service, which pushed Todd beyond what the Department of Education defines as home-schooling. Todd Academy was born.

“We cater to unique kids and work only with gifted kids,” said Todd. Every one of the academy’s students attends IUPUI at least some of the time. Last year, 33 students were enrolled, but because of an unusually large graduating class, only 15 students are taking part this year, working until the March relocation in



▲ Headmaster Jason Bettis (seated) was joined by students (l-r) Jevon Molett, Gabe Kaufman, Danny Lawson, Mason Wade Broughton, Wesley Shafer and Stefany Boleyn on March 23 when Todd Academy conducted its first day of classes in its new Lockerbie Square building.

Todd Academy seeks to challenge students

Every high school-level student attends class on IUPUI campus

cramped quarters leased at 430 W. Fall Creek Parkway North Drive from Christ Temple Apostolic Church.

Todd Academy began Downtown, in space leased from Unity Church at 901 N. Delaware St. in the St. Joseph neighborhood. The school’s rapid growth led to the move north, and again to the move back Downtown.

Now, following the spring break relocation to Lockerbie Square, Todd finds herself with a 5,000-square-foot building at her disposal. Among the reasons for job: the staff no longer has

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to pack up all the school's equipment each Friday afternoon and shove it into a small storage room so that the church can offer its weekend programming. She is also very pleased to be back Downtown, close to a wealth of resources which can help nurture her high-achieving students. Todd students are required to get involved in their community. Junior high students must do 10 hours of community service a year, senior high schoolers 20 hours. Field trips are also a part of the curriculum, such as trips to the Greek Festival, Irish Festival, Storytelling Festival and Renaissance Fair.

Transportation to and from school, and to and from school and campus, is accomplished through what Todd called "a huge carpool effort." Because of the nature of the school, she said, parking is not a major concern for her new Downtown home, and has been resolved by leasing 12 spaces from Axia Urban, the development firm from which Todd bought the Lockerbie building, in a lot just across New York Street.

Todd believes the new space will allow for as many as 50 to 60 students – although because much of any student's time is spent at IUPUI, there probably won't be more than 15 or 20 in the Lockerbie building at any one time.

The deal is this: All students are typically working two grade-levels above their age, perhaps even more in areas of their greatest strengths. All junior high students take high school classes; all high schoolers take college classes. They are taught by a cadre of specialized part-time teachers. "You have to be a gifted teacher to survive here," said Todd, who explained that the students pose challenging questions for any so-called expert.

Todd Academy students take part in an IUPUI program called SPAN – Special Programs for Academic Nurturing – founded in 1984 as a way for high school students to take college classes. Todd understands that placing younger students in the college environment can present some socialization problems, but she said that issue is softened because, as a mostly commuter college, IUPUI does not have the set social circles as would a traditional campus such as Ball State.

Furthermore, she said, her students "float back and forth" between Todd Academy and campus, often times with college students who make up some of the staff at the academy. "Our kids talk at a higher level, and they're still involved in their own age groups at Todd Academy. And, because they all mentally work at the same level, it doesn't matter."

Suzanne Shafer, an Avon mother who has two children in Todd Academy, used her 13-year-old son as an example. He will enroll in his first college class this summer, after which there will be an evaluation not only of his intellectual skills, but his social skills as well. Only after that evaluation will he be allowed to take IUPUI classes next fall.

At least one Todd student passed that test – a 14-year-old who is not only a third-year college Japanese language student, but is a full-time student at IUPUI.

It's important, Shafer said, that students are mature enough so they "don't act like a 13-year-old dork."



◀ Todd Academy now sits in a Lockerbie Square commercial building at the corner of East and New York Streets. The building was constructed in 1861-63 as a bakery and most recently used as a law office.