



MAP ACADEMY

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[Episode 18: This Mom Knew Her Daughter Needed a Different Kind of High School](#)

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Nick: Map Academy is a charter public high school located in Plymouth, Massachusetts, designed to serve students that traditional schools have failed. Map sees students as the individuals they are with complex lives inside and outside of school. Map focuses on creating a safe and supportive environment where all students can thrive. Meet Zo, a student at Map. Her initial experience of high school was traumatic.

Zo: I wasn't doing well in classes because I also struggled [00:00:30] with work a little bit. I was absent a lot because I actually have a medical disability. I'm a Type 1 diabetic. Sometimes my blood sugars would be out of level and it would make me feel sick. Even some days I'd think about going in late, but then their late policy would be like, "Oh, you have to come in by this time or you're not even marked present for the day."

Nick: Like Zo, many students get off track for a host of complicated reasons.

Joanne: I mean, she's so bright. She really is. [00:01:00] She was doing really well, and then when she hit high school, it was a completely different story, and no matter who I reached out to, it was just brushed off.

Nick: This is Joanne, Zo's mom. We asked her what it was like trying to get the school to provide the interventions and support Zo needed.

Joanne: It was very frustrating to say the least because I know how smart she is and for her to not get very good grades and not want to come to school, for it to be a struggle for me to [00:01:30] get Zo to go to school, it was an issue because up until then, basically, Zo loved school. When she was in elementary school, she almost never missed a day.

Once she got into high school and she started having the whole overwhelming school issue and she was being bullied. I even sent an email to the principal explaining what my feelings were and what was going on. I was like, [00:02:00] "Do you understand what the consequences are of a child that's being bullied?" They just blew it off like it was no big deal. I was horrified, to be honest.

Zo: If I didn't have issues with being motivated or having the medical problems I do, I probably would have graduated maybe a year ago with the pace I usually work at but because of the things that hold me back, I take a little longer to work sometimes. [00:02:30] Honestly, I did consider dropping out for a while.

Joanne: It was to the point where I almost considered just letting her drop out and do like a GED because it was just getting to be too much for her emotionally.

Zo: Then once I heard about Map and actually met Rachel and Josh, it was a huge game-changer.

Nick: We asked how they found their way to Map and what their first impressions were.

Zo: At first, my mom was just like, "Oh, you're going to a new school [00:03:00] next year." I was like, "Oh." It was just like, "Ah," but then once I actually met them and they were talking about the school and just what their goal was, I was just like, "I want to be at Map."

Joanne: I thought it was awesome. It's like a little college campus, but at the same time, it's almost like home. It's very, very cozy, very well [00:03:30] organized. Everybody's close, but you still get your own space. I couldn't ask for better. She was very, very afraid of, "Oh my God, I'm not going to know anybody," but that didn't last very long. They just welcome everybody in and everybody is just so nice that it just was a perfect fit. Everything just fit [00:04:00] perfect.

Nick: At Map, they put every student at the center of a web of support, prioritizing social-emotional health.

Zo: I also have a lot of social anxiety. It would also be working on that a little bit, which definitely I've also been working on ever since I went to Map. If you saw me when I first entered Map and we did that, I couldn't even order food for myself and I'd have to have someone else to do it for me. Now I can do it perfectly fine mostly. I was [00:04:30] literally just afraid to talk to people just in general. I wouldn't even ask for help on things while now I actually can.

Joanne: There's not one person at that school that I couldn't say is awesome. Everyone looks out for everybody else, whether they're your teacher or not, they're still right there. If you have an issue, I don't think there's anybody-- where Zo even is so shy, she will go into Map and ask anybody anything. [00:05:00] There's not one person that she finds unapproachable there. That says a lot.

Zo: I feel like at normal schools there's like, "Oh, academics only are like that a little bit." It's mostly like, "Oh, you either fit in or you don't." While at Map, you have people of all sorts of backgrounds, and not everyone fits into the norm, but that's the thing [00:05:30] about Map, you don't have to fit in anywhere. You can just be yourself.

Joanne: They're so accepted. Everybody is just so non-bullying and they don't need to feel like they don't fit, everybody fits. No matter what your situation may be, whether you're there because you just choose to be there or whether you're there because you're struggling from [00:06:00] another school because of your academics or you're struggling because of your emotional situation, or maybe you're homeless and you're there. It doesn't matter everybody still gets treated the same.

Nick: At Map learning is all about exploring curiosity in personal achievement. It's not about competing, ranking, or complying. Teachers have the space and time to uncover each student's strengths, interests, and learning style.

Zo: That's one of the other things about Map too. It's not like a one-size-fits-all. [00:06:30] For example, if you're someone who is more hands-on and the activity isn't hands-on, they can adjust it so it's a hands-on activity or even if it were the opposite way around. If it's a hands-on, do you learn more by reading? It can be a reading activity.

Nick: At Map flexibility is built-in. Students work at their own pace and learning can happen in school and out of school.

Zo: At your own pace could mean a few things. Sometimes you could [00:07:00] work faster than the normal pace, or you might even need more time to be able to understand what's even going on. It's not a race. It definitely was a weird adjustment at first. I did work as if it was still like a traditional school at first, but then I slowly got into the groove and I was like, "Okay, I don't have to work if I'm not feeling up to it, like if I'm having a bad day or whatever."

Nick: As much as Zo talks about working at her own pace here, it's [00:07:30] important to note that Map Academy students still have to meet all the same basic graduation requirements that they would have to meet at any other high school. For every high school in the state, including Map, the state standards are the same. What makes Map different is the student's path to meeting those standards. [crosstalk]

Zo: If I even want to do extra work, I can do that. It's not like I have to do like, "Oh, you have to do math and science, then English and whatever." It can be whatever you choose to do.

Nick: We asked Zo what her [00:08:00] vision for the future is.

Zo: I'm both excited and nervous just because it's exciting to see that I'm soon going to enter a new chapter, but also at the same time, it's like, "Oh, what's going to happen after?" What college am I going to go to? I'm technically a graduate, yes, but I am going to be staying at Map a little bit longer. I'm going to be [00:08:30] academically finished, but there's still going to be some post-secondary stuff I'm going to work at when the school year starts next year. I'm not sure for how long exactly.

Nick: Post-secondary planning is actually a graduation requirement at Map. For a student like Zo who might be better off staying within the Map community for a bit longer, being able to work on that post-secondary plan for another semester makes a lot of sense.

Zo: I'm trying to think of how to explain it because as I have [00:09:00] said, yes, I'm academically ready, but socially and emotionally, I'm not quite ready to enter college yet or just in general, be done with high school.

Nick: That's another difference about graduating from Map Academy. It's not all about completing the academic credits. It's also about having the social-emotional tools and life skills for the next phase.

Joanne: Yes. She's going to hold off. [00:09:30] Basically, she is academically could be finished. She could graduate, but we just thought that emotionally if she went to college right now with all of this craziness going on, that it would be a fail and then she wouldn't want to go back. I think sticking at Map and maybe doing some college courses and whatnot, preparing a little bit more for the real world is what she needs. It's certainly not the academics.

Zo: You plan on staying for [00:10:00] probably at least a couple more months just to work on that a little bit more and figure out like adulting.

Nick: Before we said goodbye, we asked Zo and Joanne to sum up their experience at Map.

Zo: When I say Map has been a game-changer, it's literally turned my life around in a 180 pretty match.

Joanne: I think Map is the best thing since sliced bread. I can fly around in an airplane with a banner. [laughs] **[00:10:30]**

Nick: Thanks for listening to another episode of *Education Disruption*. We'll be back soon with more inspiring students' stories. Map Academy is a free public charter high school in Plymouth, Massachusetts that believes with the right support, all students can succeed. If you enjoyed this podcast, please subscribe and give us a rating. This is Nick Tetrault. Our executive producer is Kristen Hughes and this is a Hairpin production.

Josh: Hello. This is Josh, co-founder of Map Academy. If you or someone you know **[00:11:00]** works in education or youth development and wants to make a difference, check out our website at themapacademy.org. For current openings, a staff referral program and a form you can use if there's a new listing that matches what you do. We need talented teachers and youth development professionals that are ready to do high school differently and be there for students who need them the most. Thanks for listening.

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