

SUPPORT FOR

HOME-BASED EDUCATION



Pioneering
Partnerships
Between
Public Schools and
Families Who
Instruct Their
Children at Home

A Guide for State Policymakers,

Local Boards of Education,

and School Administrators

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Foreword

Homeschooling is a subject on which too little is known. Until recently, it was viewed as a fringe movement of religious zealots and survivalists who were hostile to public schooling and government. In recent years, homeschooling has expanded, with the government estimating that about 2 percent of students are being schooled at home. Further, studies of homeschooling families suggest much greater diversity than was previously assumed.

Charter schools and curriculum providers have emerged to serve this population, and a large proportion receive at least some of their education in local public or private schools. As homeschooling has become more widespread, major policy questions have emerged. The question posed by this monograph is why and how public schools might provide educational support for homeschooling families and their children.

For the last twenty years, Patricia Lines has followed the homeschooling movement, and she is considered one of the foremost national experts on this topic. In this monograph, she provides a concise picture of the homeschooling movement and its many features, details that are little-known to schooling authorities. From this highly informative foundation, Lines proceeds to describe the different forms of support that public-schooling entities can provide for homeschooling families.

As she emphasizes, there are many ways in which homeschoolers can benefit from public-school resources, including books and materials, part-time enrollment in classes, parental support, extracurricular activities, and e-learning assistance with curriculum. In an extensive

chapter, she provides the reader with seven detailed reports of site visits to demonstrate how these mechanisms are provided by a range of public-school centers.

Lines makes an important contribution by highlighting the distinction between independent homeschooling and a recent phenomenon that bears superficial resemblance, use of a school enrollment option that includes learning on- and off-site, where the latter is relegated to the guidance of parents. Some public schools have become adept at attracting families interested in home-based education into their programs, and at the same time they have created a new category of student that can't quite be considered a homeschooler. Lines calls these students *enrolled home-based* students, for want of a better term.

The distinctions have become blurred indeed, as some homeschoolers retain their independence and may use public resources only now and then, while others are willing to surrender their independence and accept the public-school curriculum and assessment procedures. These latter students look like enrolled students except that they are off-site, usually at home, much of the school week.

Lines also demonstrates some of the advantages to school districts of provision of support for homeschooling. As a concrete reminder of the fact that they are “all our children,” she informs us that the average tenure of homeschooling is probably about two years, meaning that, *de facto*, the public schools share educational responsibilities with most, though not all, homeschooling families.

Part-time attendance by homeschoolers in public-school classes and other activities is also common, with the result that many students receive at least a portion of their education in specialized courses in the public schools. Addressing public-school officials, Lines emphasizes that there are many considerations in start-

ing a partnership with homeschoolers, including financial issues, accountability, and establishing mutual respect and collaboration.

Indeed, the theme of mutual respect and collaboration is at the foundation of this monograph. I have found it to be insightful, intelligent, balanced, and helpful for guiding public policy on a topic that is often highly contentious. Lines defuses the contention by providing a clearly written and highly useful background, practical discussion of issues, and thoughtful recommendations. This publication should be a unique and valuable resource for educational policymakers, educators, and parents in considering how best to serve homeschooling populations.

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Introduction

This book provides information for public-school policymakers and administrators who may be thinking about offering resources to support home-based education. By 2002, so many homeschooling families and public educators had worked out partnerships of one kind or another that education policymakers should take note of a new and potentially revolutionary trend. Innovative public schools were offering a wide range of assistance to children who much of the time remained off campus and under the supervision of their parents. This publication reports on the practices of states and school districts that are experimenting with such programs.

Some public educators are offering services or educational materials, or both, to children who remain off campus at least some of the time, and for some, all of the time. This guide aims to provide information that should assist public educators in making a determination about such programs. It offers some practical guidance for those who have decided to move ahead with a program. The background information may also be helpful to public educators who would prefer to delay or discourage such programs.

The publication rests on a review of available research reports, site visits, and interviews with public educators offering services to home-based children and with homeschooling leaders.

What Is Home-Based Education?

This publication distinguishes between two main types of off-campus learning: *independent homeschooling*¹ and *enrolled home study*. In both independent homeschooling and enrolled home study, parents supervise the child's activities on

a day-to-day basis. The similarity ends there. In independent homeschooling, parents determine the curriculum and assess the child's progress, even though they may use public resources to supplement the program. In enrolled home study, students follow a curriculum approved by the school and participate in assessments required of all enrolled children. For older, independent learners, independent-home-schooling parents monitor the child's activities and offer assistance where needed. Teachers do this for the students in enrolled home study.

The more general terms of *home study*, *home-based study*, or *off-campus learning* will refer to both independent homeschooling and enrolled home study.

Many variations and combinations of enrolled home study and independent home-schooling are possible. For example:

¹ The author follows the *Random House Dictionary* usage and spells *homeschooling* as one word. An analysis of electronic and print media suggests that those who practice it also favor *homeschooling*. Academic writers have preferred *home schooling*, *home-schooling* or *home education*, but this preference seems to be changing.

- Independent homeschoolers may avoid public schools altogether.
- Independent homeschoolers may use public-school resources to obtain ancillary services, such as testing, or to borrow educational materials.
- Independent homeschoolers may enroll a child in one or two supplemental classes in an on-campus program, without surrendering their independent status.
- Newcomers to home-based education may be interested in full-time-enrolled distance education (a term describing any public program where the teacher and the student are at separate locations), including online instruction.
- Some parents may move their children back and forth between independent homeschooling and enrolled home study.

Some practices defy definition, as when a child participates in district assessments but the parents control most of the curriculum. To confuse matters further, participating parents and school staff informally may call it “homeschooling” when referring to a program for enrolled home study. The language may be important to many independent homeschoolers. For example, in Washington, homeschooling leaders prefer to call an enrolled option a *parent-partnered* program.²

In both independent homeschooling and enrolled home study, parents supervise the child’s activities on a day-to-day basis. The similarity ends there. For older, independent learners, independent homeschooling parents monitor the child’s activities and offer assistance where needed. Teachers do this for the students

in enrolled home study. Even more important, in independent homeschooling, parents determine the curriculum and assess the child’s progress. In enrolled home study, students follow a curriculum approved by the school and participate in assessments required of all enrolled children.

One should also note, to be sensitive to subtleties in the language, that some independent homeschoolers call what they do *unschooling* or *deschooling* to emphasize their pedagogical philosophy and practices, which are strongly child-directed (Holt 1981; Guterson 1992). However, once the conversation gets going, even the unschoolers end up using the term homeschooling (for example, Guterson). The unschoolers, by the way, are often willing to enroll a child in one or more classes, so long as the basic program remains independent and child-directed.

Preview

The first chapter provides a brief description of the families who participate in these options. It describes the population and some of the resources that these families use. The second chapter discusses how some public schools have provided resources for home-based study. Reports of several longitudinal site visits in the third chapter describe school districts that have established centers serving home-based learners and how they have changed over time.

In chapter 4, critical issues that the public educator may face when implementing any program for home-based education are examined. These include sources of support and resistance, startup issues, financial accounting and accountability, program accountability, and some basic constitutional issues. Finally, chapter 5 outlines some policy considerations, primarily for those at the state level, though local policy-

² With apologies to my homeschooling friends in Washington, I will, nonetheless, use *enrolled home study* for options requiring school enrollment. *Parent-partnered* could refer to full-time on-campus learning in some states.

makers may face some of the same issues that state policymakers must face.

A single overriding point will emerge from all this discussion: Public educators who are open to partnering with home-based families should realize that, especially for independent homeschoolers, the intended beneficiaries may not be very receptive to assistance from any governmental agency. Homeschoolers generally have a committed vision for the education of their children and will often be suspicious of offers of help. The wise public educator will acknowledge this reticence and will clarify from the start the differences between enrolled home study and independent home schooling.

Educators who decide to offer resources to children who remain off campus face a challenge. The programs have the potential for divisiveness in a district. Some public-school teachers may be suspicious of home-based study. Parents of on-campus children may view the extension of part-time or alternative services with a jealous eye. Homeschooling parents who cherish their independence will be wary of public educators. Even if homeschooling parents would like a little help along the way, they rarely want to sacrifice their independence and the advantages they see for their homeschooling program.