

Policy/Program Memorandum No. 131

Date of Issue: June 17, 2002 Effective: Until revoked or modified
Subject: HOME SCHOOLING

Application: Chairs of District School Boards Directors of Education Secretaries of School Authorities Principals of Elementary Schools Principals of Secondary Schools Principal of Independent Learning Centre

Introduction

This memorandum provides direction to school boards¹ and schools concerning policies related to home schooling and the excusing of children from school who are receiving home schooling. School boards should bring this memorandum to the attention of parents² who are providing home schooling.

In addition, this memorandum revokes and replaces the memorandum entitled "Determining Satisfactory Instruction Under Subsection 20(2) of the Education Act", issued in 1981 by K. D. Johnson, the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor.

The sections and subsections of the Education Act that are relevant to this memorandum are listed in appendix A.

Home schooling procedures

Procedures for Parents

Parents who decide to provide home schooling for their child(ren) should notify the school board of their intent in writing. Parents should provide the name, gender, and date of birth of each child who is receiving home schooling, and the telephone number and address of the home. The letter

should be signed by the parent(s). Parents may use the sample letter provided in appendix B to this memorandum. If the home address changes, parents should notify the school board of the change of address.

If parents decide to continue to provide home schooling in subsequent years, they should give notification each year in writing prior to September 1 to the school board in whose jurisdiction their child last attended school. The letter should contain the same information as that in the initial letter described above.

Procedures for School Boards

When parents give a board written notification of their intent to provide home schooling for their child, the board should consider the child to be excused from attendance at school, in accordance with subsection 21(2), clause (a), of the Education Act. The board should accept the written notification of the parents each year as evidence that the parents are providing satisfactory instruction at home. The board should send a letter each year to the parents, acknowledging the notification; for this purpose, the board may use the sample letter in appendix C.

Normally, the board should not investigate the matter. However, if there are reasonable grounds to suspect that the child is not receiving satisfactory instruction at home, the board should take steps to determine whether the instruction is satisfactory, as outlined in the next section.

Board investigations of home schooling

Reasons for an Investigation

As stated above, it is the responsibility of school boards to

excuse children from attendance at school when home schooling is provided, in accordance with subsection 21(2), clause (a), of the Education Act. However, where a board has reasonable grounds to be concerned that the instruction provided in the home may not be satisfactory, the board should investigate the matter.

The following is a list of some of the reasons that may give a board cause to investigate a particular instance of home schooling:

- refusal of a parent to notify the board in writing of the intent to provide home schooling
- a credible report of concern by a third party with respect to the instruction being provided in the home
- evidence that the child was removed from attendance at school because of ongoing conflicts with the school, not for the purpose of home schooling
- a history of absenteeism by the child prior to the parent's notifying the board of the intent to provide home schooling

Guidelines for Conducting an Investigation

In conducting an investigation, the board may have one of its officials meet with the family or it may ask the parent to submit information about the home schooling in writing.

Whether meeting with the family or reviewing information submitted in writing, board officials should recognize that the methodology, materials, schedules, and assessment techniques used by parents who provide home schooling may differ from those used by educators in the school system. For example, the parent may not be following the Ontario curriculum, using standard classroom practices in the home, or teaching within the standard school day or school year. Determining whether instruction is satisfactory

should therefore focus on the following:

- a plan for educating the child
- plans to ensure literacy and numeracy at developmentally appropriate levels
- plans for assessing the child's achievement

If the board chooses to have a board official meet with the family, the following questions and requests may be used as a guide for the discussion:

- Do you have an instructional plan, regularly planned instructional time, and a daily work schedule? Please provide details.
- What subjects are you teaching?
- What do you expect to accomplish with your child in English, mathematics, and other subjects this year?
- Is your instructional program based on the Ontario curriculum or on a different curriculum?
- If you follow the Ontario curriculum, which documents do you use?
- If you do not use Ontario curriculum documents, please describe the curriculum documents you do use.
- Please describe the typical kinds of activities that you provide for your child in the subjects you are teaching. Please provide samples of your child's work in each subject area.
- What types of materials do you use to assist you in accomplishing your plans (e.g., encyclopaedias, textbooks, magazines, newspapers, television programs, materials on the Internet, computer programs)?
- Please describe the techniques you use to assess your child's learning.
- Do you use community resources to support your instruction? If so, which ones?
- Do you network with other parents who provide home schooling? How?
- Please feel free to provide any other information that

would help the board determine whether instruction is satisfactory.

If the board chooses to request a written submission from the parent, board officials may ask the parent to complete a form such as the sample form in appendix D.

If the board is unable to determine from this investigation whether the child is receiving satisfactory instruction at home, it may take further action, in accordance with subsection 24(2) and/or section 30 of the Education Act (for further information, see appendix A to this memorandum and the section entitled "Inquiries by the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor" on page 6 of this memorandum).

The Role of Home-Schooling Support Associations in an Investigation

When a board official is conducting the investigation, a member of a recognized support group for parents who provide home schooling may be present. These support groups include the Ontario Federation of Teaching Parents, the Ontario Christian Home Educators' Connection, the Home School Legal Defence Association of Canada, and the Catholic Home Schoolers' Association – Ontario.

Access to resources for parents providing home schooling

Parents who have given a school board written notification of their intent to provide home schooling may request access to the resources outlined below.

Assessments and Tests Administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office

Parents providing home schooling may wish their child(ren)

to participate in assessments for students in Grades 3, 6, and 9, and/or the Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (normally given to students in Grade 10), all of which are administered by the Education Quality and Accountability Office (EQAO). These parents must contact the school board by September 30 (or another date specified by the school board) of the year in which the assessments/tests are being conducted for information about the dates, times, and locations. Parents who wish their children to participate in any of these assessments/tests will not be charged a fee either by the board or by the EQAO.

The board should provide space for these children at a local school at the time and on the dates when assessments/tests are being administered to the board's regular day school students. The school will request sufficient assessment/test materials from the EQAO so that the children who are receiving home schooling can participate. The school will also inform the parent of the date, time, and location of the assessment/test. It is the responsibility of the parent to provide transportation for the child to and from the site.

The EQAO will send the results of children who are receiving home schooling to the school where they participated in the assessment/test. Schools will send these children's results directly to the children's homes. The results of children who are receiving home schooling will not be included in school and board reports generated by the EQAO or by the schools and boards.

Courses Offered Through the Independent Learning Centre

A parent who wishes to enrol a child of compulsory school age in courses offered through the Independent Learning Centre (ILC) may do so, provided that the parent has notified the school board of the intent to provide home schooling. To enrol the child with the ILC, the parent must

submit the enrolment form to the ILC, along with a letter from the school board (such as the sample letter in appendix C) indicating that the child is receiving home schooling and is excused from attendance at school.

Students taking courses through the ILC pay an administration fee that applies to every course offered by the ILC, including full-credit, half-credit, and non-credit courses. Parents may obtain information about fees and enrolment forms directly from the ILC.

Ministry of Education Curriculum Material

Parents who are providing home schooling may download curriculum policy documents and curriculum support material produced by the Ministry of Education free of charge from the ministry's website, at www.edu.gov.on.ca. This material may also be obtained through Publications Ontario. Parents may contact Publications Ontario by calling its toll-free telephone number, 1-800-668-9938, or they may visit its website, at www.ontario.ca/serviceontario, for more information.

Support Services Offered by the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care

Families in which children are receiving home schooling have access to Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care school health support and personal support services (and equipment) through the local community care access centres (CCACs) of the Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care. Regulation 386/99 under the Long-Term Care Act sets out the eligibility criteria for these services. The first criterion is that "the person must be enrolled as a pupil at a school or be receiving satisfactory instruction at home in accordance with clause 21(2)(a) of the Education Act." For a child who is receiving home schooling to be eligible for these services, the parent must provide the local CCAC with a letter from

the school board (such as the sample letter in appendix C) indicating that the child is excused from attendance at school because the child is receiving satisfactory instruction at home.

Clarification of related policy

Prior Learning Assessment and Recognition (PLAR)

Sections 6.6 and 6.7.2 and appendix 8, "Equivalent Diploma Requirements", of *Ontario Secondary Schools, Grades 9 to 12: Program and Diploma Requirements, 1999 (OSS)* will also apply to students enrolled in an Ontario secondary school, other than mature students (as defined in OSS), who are entering secondary school after having received home schooling.

Funding for Part-Time Attendance

The Ministry of Education provides funding to boards for students who attend school on a part-time basis. The per-pupil grants are prorated according to the amount of time the student is in attendance at the school.

Enrolment Registers

A school will not record a child who is receiving home schooling on a full-time basis in the enrolment register for full-time day school students. If, however, a student is receiving some instruction at a school operated by a board, the student's enrolment for this instruction will be recorded in the appropriate register. Refer to the Instructions section of the appropriate register for details.

Inquiries by the provincial school attendance counsellor

When a school board is unable to determine whether a child is receiving satisfactory instruction, it may request that the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor inquire into the case under subsection 24(2) of the Education Act. The Provincial School Attendance Counsellor will appoint an inquiry officer to conduct the inquiry. If the inquiry determines that the child is not receiving satisfactory instruction and the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor orders that the child attend school, the school board must determine the appropriate action to be taken.

Before requesting an inquiry by the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor, the board should ensure that it has:

- taken appropriate steps to determine whether the child is receiving satisfactory instruction;
- retained documentation of its communication with the parents, including copies of written communication, notes on telephone calls and other verbal communication, a record of the types of communication (e.g., telephone call, registered letter), and a record of the number of attempts to communicate;
- retained documentation on the nature of the information and material provided by the parent in response to the board's investigation;
- prepared a factual summary of its investigation, including a conclusion, which will be forwarded to the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor.

Appendix A: Legislation

The following sections of the Education Act are relevant to this memorandum:

- Subsection 21(1) requires every child to attend school from the age of six until the age of sixteen.
- Subsection 21(2) lists the legal reasons that a child may be

- excused from attending school. One of the reasons is that "the child is receiving satisfactory instruction at home or elsewhere", stated in clause (a).
- Subsection 21(5) requires parents to send children to school.
 - Subsection 24(1) deals with the appointment of the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor, and subsection 24(2) sets out the authority and mandate of the Provincial School Attendance Counsellor to conduct an inquiry into the reasons for, and other circumstances related to, a child's non-attendance at school.
 - Section 25 deals with the appointment by school boards of school attendance counsellors, and authorizes a school attendance counsellor to enforce compulsory school attendance.
 - Section 26 sets out the duties and powers of school attendance counsellors.
 - Section 30 deals with prosecution of parents or guardians for a child's non-attendance at school.
 - Subsection 30(7) authorizes a court to order an inquiry under subsection 24(2).

Appendix B, C and D

The following forms are included in the appendix: (124 KB – Adobe Acrobat file)

- Sample letter indicating notification of intent to provide home schooling
- Sample letter in response to a parent's notification
- Sample of form for gathering information in an investigation

1 In this document, *school board* and *board* refer to district school boards and school authorities.

2 In this document, *parent(s)* refers to parent(s) and guardian(s).