



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

By Patricia M. Lines
Foreword by Henry M. Levin

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Partnerships Bring New Directions to Homeschooling

In Support for Home-Based Education: Pioneering Partnerships Between Public Schools and Families Who Instruct Their Children at Home, Dr. Patricia M. Lines reports on the practices of states and school districts experimenting with educational partnerships. She also provides valuable information and practical recommendations for public-school policymakers and administrators thinking about offering resources and guidance to support home-based education.

Homeschooling, of course, is not new in American education. Even after public education became available in the nineteenth century, many parents took responsibility for their children's instruction. By the mid-twentieth century, universal high school graduation was the standard. Still, some traditional religious communities educated their children at home. These groups continue to practice their unique forms of homeschooling.

The modern homeschooling movement began quietly in the late 1960s and early '70s when a small number of families began to resist school attendance requirements. At that time, most homeschooling families pursued a liberal philosophy of child-directed educa-

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FROM THE FOREWORD

“Addressing public-school officials, Lines emphasizes that there are many considerations in starting 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 conten-

tious. 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.”

Henry M. Levin

Director, National Center for the Study of Privatization in Education

tion. Many homeschoolers still believe that the best learning takes place when a child is free to pursue learning without formal direction.

What is new in homeschooling is the forming of partnerships between homeschooling families and public educators. Patricia Lines calls this a potentially revolutionary trend.

“By 2002,” she writes, “so many homeschooling families and public educators had worked out partnerships of one kind or another that education

policymakers should take note.... Innovative public schools were offering a wide range of assistance to children who remained off campus and under the supervision of their parents.”

Lines emphasizes that homeschoolers have a committed vision for the education of their children and are often suspicious of offers of outside help.

“The wise public educator will acknowledge this reticence and will clarify from the start the differences between enrolled home study and independent homeschooling,” Lines cautions.

Advice for Administrators

Reporting on some of the ways in which public-school programs provide resources to homeschoolers, Lines offers the following advice to districts considering such programs:

- Consider a small program first.
- Plan curricula ahead.
- Keep in mind parents’ individual interests and hopes for their children.
- Don’t offer evaluation, counseling, or programs to train parents only; these usually are unwelcome.
- To avoid turf battles, plan the program with home educators, parks, museums, libraries, children’s hospitals, and other institutions and organizations already serving children.

- Experiment with program offerings and hours, including nontechnical classes and online instruction, and day, evening, and weekend offerings; not all home-based education takes place during school hours.
- Advertise for teachers with a clear statement about the program.
- Market homeschooling programs; announce the program on the web, at homeschooling organizations, public libraries, and parks department facilities.
- Understand state requirements; help parents, teachers, and students understand state requirements.
- Be fully aware of capacity limits.

A lengthy chapter is devoted to reports of the author’s site visits to school districts that have established centers serving home-based learners. In the South Whidbey Island (Washington) School District, for example, a teacher helps independent homeschooling parents find curricular materials and design their home program through the district’s Shared Schooling Cooperative.

When implementing any program for home-based education, public educators face several critical issues. Lines offers detailed advice on these topics:

- The need for support
- Coordinating with major players
- Finding staff
- Recruiting and retaining students
- Financial issues
- Academic accountability
- Church-state issues
- Managing growth and turnover

Policy Guidance

Finally, primarily for those at the state level, Lines outlines policy considerations and challenges policymakers with the following questions:

- Does your state have generous and flexible per-pupil support?
- Does your state mandate support for home-based children?

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- Does your state require interdistrict transfers?
- Does your state have rules for auditing off-campus services, including some flexibility that recognizes the different nature of such services?
- Does your state have clear rules for academic accountability that apply to off-campus and part-time learning?
- Are you prepared for some imbalance in the ethnic diversity of the student body?
- Is your state ready to fund research and evaluation of off-campus learning programs?

Other resources contained in the volume include a compendium of first-hand experience from practitioners, a list of state policies supporting home-based education, and a checklist for

school districts offering support for home-based education.

Educators who decide to offer resources to children who remain off campus face a challenge. Some teachers are suspicious of home-based study. Parents of on-campus children may resent the extending of part-time or alternative services. Homeschooling parents, who cherish their independence, may 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 in their homeschooling program.

“Even if there is animosity between some public educators and some homeschoolers, others from both groups

seem willing to form partnerships,” Lines writes in her conclusion. “Homeschoolers seeking access to resources have found growing opportunities. Public educators interested in offering such opportunities have usually found a constituency ready to accept them.”

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- New book guides school districts in partnering with home-based learners.
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