

Home Schooling in New York State

The rise of home schooling is one of the more significant social trends of the past half-century. Defined as the elective process by which parents assume responsibility for the formal education of their children, the number of students taught at home has increased at least threefold in less than ten years. Today, federal estimates put the population of home schoolers at 1 million students nationwide, and growing. As a result, there is significant interest in the impact of home schooling among diverse stakeholders. Unfortunately, a dearth of well-designed and unbiased research precludes any definitive conclusion about the educational efficacy of home schooling. There is also much variability in terms of how individual states mandate and monitor the education of home schoolers. What can be ascertained about the practice in New York State?

According to the NYS Education Department, there were 28,000 reported home-schooled students, K-12 for the year 1999-2000, representing less than 1% of the state's school age population. The regulations governing parental and school responsibilities in New York are more rigorous than in other states. Highlights of Section 100.10 of the regulations include the following:

- ❑ Parents must submit to the district an **Individualized Home Instruction Plan (IHIP)** that spells out syllabi, curriculum materials and plan of instruction.
- ❑ Parents must report cumulative hours of instruction and keep attendance records.
- ❑ The district must be provided with quarterly reports of student progress.
- ❑ Although Regents exams are optional, annual assessments using commercially published norm-referenced achievement tests or district approved alternative/equivalent assessments must be conducted.
- ❑ Qualified persons approved by the district must administer assessment tests.
- ❑ Deficiencies in student achievement must be addressed in a remediation plan submitted to the district.
- ❑ Failure to comply with the annual assessment plan can place the home instruction program on probation for up to two school years.

Despite these accountability standards, there is little uniformity with which *compliance* is gauged. Oversight and accountability are largely left to the discretion of the school superintendent. Similarly, there are differences at the local level as to whether home-schooled students may be permitted to participate in supplemental activities sponsored by the school, such as intramural sports and clubs.

On another note, there is currently a bill (S4767) spearheaded by Senator John Kuhl, Chairman of the Education Committee, to provide mandate relief for homeschoolers. If approved, parents of home-schooled students would be released from many of the above-described regulations, resulting in significantly reduced paperwork. Interestingly, a group of parents oppose its passage in light of future uncertainties. They argue that in the current climate of heightened educational regulation, future amendments to the bill may increase the requirements placed on them.

Evaluation studies funded by organizations with a vested interest in home-based instruction have yielded promising results. But far more independent investigation is needed before definitive statements can be made about the effectiveness of home schooling.