

TO: Representative Webb and members of the House Education Committee
FROM: Anne Bordonaro, Division Director, Federal & Education Support Programs;
Alicia Hanrahan, Interagency Programs and Home Study Manager
DATE: September 4, 2020
RE: Management of home study programs at the Agency of Education

Comparative home study enrollment data – 2019 and 2020:

Enrollments as of August 27, 2019: **2024**

Enrollments as of August 27, 2020: **4,455**

Of these the agency has:

- completed processing for **2,706 enrollments**
- **1,749** enrollments still being processed (more coming in daily)

Enrollment deadlines:

Parents may enroll in home study (HS) at any point up to May 1 for that school year. They may unenroll and reenroll in their local school at any time. August 1 is the deadline for those families seeking the Minimum Course of Study (MCOS) exemption allowed in statute. MCOSs are required every year (unless the family qualifies for the exemption). The MCOS exemption enables a family whose student is entering the third year of continuous enrollment not to submit an MCOS for that year or subsequent years, although one still is required at age 12. Siblings of a student with the exemption also qualify for the exemption.

Enrollment requirements:

- An enrollment form with basic demographic information (this form also requires the signature of parents who have legal educational rights).
- An MCOS, unless the student qualifies for the exemption
- A Form B or equivalent (report card, statement from family doctor or an educator, etc.) discussing whether the child has any disabilities and if so, what adaptations the family intends to provide for the child's disability

Additional Forms that may not be required for every family:

- If the student's last name and parent/s last names are not the same or if there is a single parent, then the Assurance Form is completed
- If a student has a disability, the Adaptations form is completed
- If someone other than the parent is providing the instruction (i.e. if a friend is teaching Algebra) then Form C is completed

Special education entitlement or eligibility for services:

A child enrolled in home study loses his/her eligibility for a Free and Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) under IDEA. In other words, the LEA is no longer required to provide certain services the student might have been receiving before or might need.

LEAs may provide a Services Plan (not a legal entitlement like an IEP but similar in purpose) for home study students with special needs if requested and continue to provide some services to children with special needs enrolled in home study. Providing such plans is solely within the LEA's discretion.

Under IDEA, LEAs are required to set aside a "proportionate share" of their IDEA funds for students with special needs enrolled in home study programs or who are unilaterally placed in approved independent schools based on the child and after conducting child find activities count (not to be confused with LEA placed or Interagency/State-Placed Students). Some LEAs may not have any students in these categories or very low numbers, leading to very small amounts of funding. LEAs consult with home study families and independent schools re: how to spend this money. However, the LEA ultimately makes the funding decisions.

Compulsory age of attendance:

Vermont requires students 6-16 to be enrolled in school or home study. The AOE interprets this to mean that a child who turns 6 during a school year must be enrolled in home study or school by the fall of the following school year.

Eligibility to access school courses/extracurricular activities:

The AOE interprets a student as enrolled in home study if at least 60% of his/her core academic subjects (math, science, reading/writing, history/government/civics, and literature), are completed via home study. Non-core subjects include Fine Arts, Physical Education and Health. These topics are not required after age 12.

Home study students are permitted under VSA 563(24) and SBE rule 4400 to access their public school's courses and extracurricular activities. Vermont statute requires LEAs to allow home study students to enroll in school courses and activities "on the same basis as" other full-time LEA students (e.g., first-come, first-served, in order of seniority or need, etc.). School boards are required to have policies governing access of HS students to both courses and extracurricular activities. Recently, questions have arisen regarding access to LEA courses and activities during COVID-19. It is the Agency's position that while State Board Rule 4403 requires schools to accept part-time enrollment from home study students "on the same basis as full-time students," this rule does not grant home study students an absolute right to access a particular course or section of a course. Schools may deny access to courses due to logistical limits, including capacity limits, or public health and safety considerations.

Impact on ADM:

It is our understanding that under statute, LEAs receive .03 FTE toward ADM for each activity in which a home school student participates. Sean Cousino, from our Finance Team, indicated that this may affect an LEA's equalized pupil count, which affects their tax rate. However, he did

not know whether it would affect an LEA's funding. Brad James can provide more information on fiscal matters related to home study.

MCOS:

The Agency does not provide or recommend curricula. Even if a parent chooses to enroll their student full-time directly in a virtual academy of their choosing, they still must enroll in home study because they are doing so outside of their local school's curriculum and enrollment process.

The Agency does not provide any state funds for tuition, materials, online courses, etc. for families who choose home study. Those parents may be able to access online courses (for example, VTVLC courses) through partial enrollment in their local school (see above).