
TESTIMONY

Testimony To: Senate Committee on Education

Respectfully Submitted by: Vermont Agency of Education

Subject: Follow up on Home Study Testimony

Date: April 29, 2026

Thank you for the opportunity to provide testimony on the Agency of Education's management of the home study program as it relates to changes contemplated to H.930. This bill remains a key priority for the AOE this session in order to address the needs of students, families and schools to improve school attendance across the state.

As discussion of the bill has evolved, members of the committee have expressed interest in adding a hearing mechanism to the home study enrollment process that would enable the AOE to obtain an order to terminate a home study enrollment under certain conditions.

As noted by the Deputy Secretary in testimony on Tuesday, April 28, recent developments in home study oversight have important implications for implementation of a new hearing process. As the committee is aware, interest and enrollment in home study dramatically increased during the COVID 19 pandemic, and has not yet returned to pre-pandemic trends. The home study statute was changed on the AOE's recommendation to utilize an enrollment notice framework, following the approach taken by the majority of states, including New Hampshire.

Prior to 2023, two full time AOE positions, one partial position and an additional, seasonal, limited-service position were tasked to managing home study paperwork review. This significant use of staff time did not result in measurable quality improvement or oversight of home study programs, even pre-pandemic, because the statute did not give the AOE authority to deny home study enrollment in the vast majority of circumstances. A program could be denied enrollment only if it completely failed to provide the minimum course of study. A quick scan of minimum course of study, [16 V.S.A. § 906](#), will illustrate that the possibilities for wide gaps in student learning, when only these minimum standards are provided. Nevertheless, the old statute required AOE staff to review each and every proposed home study plan to completeness against minimum course of study requirements. In light of the dramatic increase in home study enrollments, AOE would have needed to hire several additional staff just to keep up with the paperwork, regardless of



the educational value gained from that staff time. In light of these circumstances, it was clear that a change needed to be made. The statutory switch to notice of enrollment both brought Vermont into line with the common practice in other states as well as enabled the Agency to streamline staffing resources to other priorities, such as oversight and support for approved independent schools.

Because home study enrollment trends have persisted beyond the COVID-19 pandemic, AOE requested time to examine the broader landscape: why families choose this option, how the education system might retain these students, and what level of oversight best fits Vermont's unique context. This approach is reflected in the House-passed version of H.930. Importantly, the study would occur alongside implementation of new, uniform definitions for chronic absenteeism and truancy, and in coordination with partners at DCF and the State's Attorneys.

The hearing contemplated in H.930 draft 1.1 will require the AOE to maintain a list of impartial hearing officers approved by the State Board of Education. These hearing officers will conduct the administrative hearing at which the AOE is the party prosecuting the case against the home study program and the parent, with their legal counsel if they choose to be represented, are the responsive party defending the validity of the home study program. Hearings will also require a staff attorney to bring the AOE's case, as well as represent the Agency in any resulting appeal of the hearing officer's order. Due to the high volume of special education administrative decisions in the past three school years, AOE does not have any capacity on the legal team to take on additional hearing duties. Oversight of both contracted service providers will require additional staff time from the AOE's General Counsel and is an additional resource demand.

Prior practice has not produced the intended quality outcomes, and instead increased workload and administrative burden on the Agency without any corresponding benefits for students. Advancing this provision would result in an unfunded mandate on the Agency without meaningfully addressing outcomes or quality of home study programming. Successful implementation of home study requires a clear understanding of staffing, expertise, and support needed to carry out the work in a way that achieves the intended outcomes. Until that information is available, the Agency does not recommend statutory changes.

