

CHAPTER
7

Home-Based Independent Study

Home-based independent study is a specific instructional strategy designed to assist parents who choose to educate their children at home or who travel for business or vacation and need to facilitate their children’s continuing education. This form of independent study is fully subject to *Education Code* requirements. For children to engage in independent study, they must be enrolled as students of a public school.

A Parents as Part of the Team

Many parents do not want their children to enroll in schools that have large classes. The parents are afraid their child will “get lost in the shuffle” and not get the attention he or she needs. Many parents are concerned about the language, drugs, gangs, and negative influences at the schools. Other parents want to teach their children the basics in reading and mathematics so the children have a solid foundation and confidence about learning before going to school. Some parents want to work one-on-one with their child because of the child’s personal or educational needs. Some students are bored in the classroom; at home they can cover the material at their

own pace and explore their interests in greater depth. Some families that travel for business or vacation need to teach their children at the same time.

Independent study is offered to meet the unique personal and educational needs of those families who seek an established alternative instructional strategy. The student, parent, and supervising teacher contract as a team to facilitate this process. Because the structure, staffing, and curricular needs of home independent study students are unique, the following sections are devoted to that setting. However, all the legal mandates, guidelines, and recommendations in the rest of this manual apply to home-based independent study.

B Different Structures

The principal characteristic of this kind of independent study is the parent's assumption of a major responsibility in providing the student's educational program apart from the traditional school. The supervising teacher and support staff, such as paraprofessionals and instructional aides, work directly with the children and their parents. Possible approaches include the following:

1. Home-based instruction (the school staff go to the home on a regular basis)
2. Site-based study on a county or district school or community site (not a regular campus)
3. Computer-assisted instruction (students may attend daily for two to three hours—usually in grades seven and eight—and do the rest of the work at home)
4. Site-based study on an elementary campus (staff, parents, and students may use regular school resources, such as computer laboratories, media centers, guest speakers, field trips, and so on)

Education Code Section 51746 states in part:

School districts and county offices of education offering independent study shall provide appropriate existing services and resources to enable pupils to complete their independent study successfully and shall ensure the same access to all existing services and resources in the school in which the pupil is enrolled pursuant to Section 51748 as is available to all other pupils in the school.

C Staff Responsibilities

1. Although many different people may be responsible for the successful implementation of the student's educational program, a credentialed employee of the district or county office of education must take the responsibility to coordinate, evaluate, and provide the general supervision of the student's study (*Education Code* Section 51747.5).
2. Other involved staff could include paraprofessionals, instructional aides, school volunteers, and community agencies and staffs. These individuals can assist in the student's educational program only under the general supervision of a certificated staff member.

3. The teacher and other support staff assume a variety of responsibilities, including:
 - a. Assessing the student's level of education
 - b. Determining the appropriate educational plan that includes all requirements
 - c. Modifying the curriculum as necessary for the student's success in meeting grade-level goals and objectives
 - d. Meeting with the parent and student at regularly scheduled times to assess progress
 - e. Providing parent in-service/workshops
 - f. Obtaining guest speakers
 - g. Organizing educational field trips
 - h. Administering state-, county-, and district-mandated tests
 - i. Coordinating the use of county or district personnel
4. To avoid the district's claiming of legally prohibited ADA because of the restrictions added to the law during the 1993 legislative session, staff must be careful to give no funds or any thing of value to a student engaged in independent study, or to his or her parent, guardian, or caregiver, beyond what is provided for students in the regular classroom (see Appendix A, *Education Code* Section 51747.3(a)). Also, the district must not claim ADA for the independent study option for anyone who resides beyond the limits set by the law in *Education Code* Section 51747.3(b), i.e., beyond the local or an immediately adjoining county.

D Policy Suggestions

In home-based independent study, each participant has a specific set of responsibilities designed to help reach the goal of educating the student. The following responsibilities are suggested.

1. The supervising teacher will:
 - a. Be responsible for the written agreement for independent study.
 - b. Assess the student's work, either orally or in written form.
 - c. Suggest reinforcement of content when needed or requested.
 - d. Personally judge the time value of student assignments or work products before ADA is earned (*Education Code* Section 51747.5(b)).

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- e. Assess the child's level of education, modifying the curriculum as necessary to meet district or county guidelines, and administer state- and district-mandated tests as required.
 - f. Inform parents of workshops that will enhance the teaching techniques of the parents.
 - g. Arrange educational field trips and visits from professional speakers on subjects in which parents and students express an interest.
 - h. Maintain records of credits for each subject earned by junior and senior high school students, based on work successfully completed.
2. Parents will:
- a. Be committed to understand and use the independent study strategy appropriately.
 - b. Provide an appropriate environment for the student's study.
 - c. Participate with the supervising teacher in the development of the student's educational plan, including goals, objectives, and assignments. (While the supervising teacher is responsible for the educational design, the parent must be concerned about his or her role and the student's needs and interests.)
 - d. Along with the student, prepare a study schedule that incorporates family and educational responsibilities.
 - e. Facilitate and enable, as much as possible, the student's effective and successful study under the written agreement. This would include avoiding disturbances during study such as phone calls, TV watching, and conflicting family duties.
 - f. Supervise the student while following the plan as the student is working on assignments, making sure that the student's effort at least meets the minimum requirement set forth in the written agreement.
 - g. Take steps to ensure the timely submission to the supervising teacher of all student work, completed assignments, and accurate records that will be needed for the assessment of student progress and attendance accounting as specified in the written agreement in accordance with Chapter 8.
 - h. Participate supportively in the regularly scheduled supervising teacher-student meetings.
- i. Under the direction of the supervising teacher and with the assistance of any other assigned school staff, participate in the student's instruction and assessment of learning and skills mastery. This may include the following:
 - Assuming responsibility for supplied textbooks, instructional materials and supplies, and equipment
 - Making intermediate assignments
 - Introducing curricular elements
 - Reinforcing learning
 - Promptly checking student work for errors, which the student should then correct and return to the teacher
 - Undertaking other assigned tasks and duties
 - j. Pay for the costs of supplemental educational requirements and the replacement or repair costs of books, equipment, and other resources loaned to the family for the purposes of the agreement that are lost or damaged beyond normal wear and tear.
 - k. Provide any transportation required by the agreement.
 - l. Whenever possible, attend workshops that provide instruction and guidance that will make independent study a satisfying and beneficial experience for the participating child and parents.
 - m. Ensure the student's voluntary participation in and understanding of independent study and facilitate the student's transfer to traditional instruction when ready or when the student is unwilling to continue in independent study.
3. Students will:
- a. Make regular, scheduled contact with the supervising teacher as specified in the written agreement, with parent participation.
 - b. Complete *at least* the assigned work by the due date.
 - c. Bring to the scheduled appointment with the supervising teacher all completed assignments that can be transported.
 - d. Make an effort to participate in pertinent public or private extracurricular activities, including social activities with other children and adults.

- e. Be responsible for other tasks that may be required to fulfill the written agreement. (Especially for students in grades seven and eight, this may include keeping a daily journal of activities and work in progress on assignments.)

E Acceptance into Independent Study

Acceptance of students into home-based independent study requires evidence of the following:

1. A sincere desire of the parents to facilitate their child's education by following independent study guidelines
2. A positive relationship between parents and student
3. Understanding of independent study by all concerned
4. A positive attitude by both the parents and the student about independent study and its requirements
5. The parents' ability to supervise their child and participate in instruction
6. The parents' agreement to meet the requirements in the written agreement
7. The student's ability and willingness to work with limited supervision by a certificated teacher
8. Availability of certificated staff to supervise students' study effectively

Education Code Section 51746(b) provides that a district or county office may require that qualified personnel "assess the achievement, abilities, interests, aptitudes, and needs of participating pupils to determine each of the following:

- (1) Whether full-time independent study is the most appropriate for the pupil being referred.
- (2) If the answer to (1) is affirmative, the determination of the most appropriate individualized plan and resources to be made available to pupils enrolled in full-time independent study."

Key terms are defined as follows in the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 11700* (selected items):

- (b) "General supervision" means the supervising teacher's
 - (1) continuing oversight of the study design, implementation plan, allocation of resources, and evaluation

of pupil or adult education progress for any pupil's or adult education student's independent study; and (2) personal determination or personal review of the determination made by another certificated teacher of the time values for apportionment purposes of each pupil's or adult education student's work products.

(c) "Independent Study" means an alternative to classroom instruction consistent with the district's course of study.

(d) "Independent study is an optional educational alternative in which no pupil may be required to participate" means

- (1) with regard to school districts or county offices of education, that
 - (A) they are not required to offer independent study, and
 - (B) school districts or county offices of education that do offer independent study are not obliged to permit a pupil or adult education student to engage in independent study if school officials given responsibility for the decision determine that independent study is not an appropriate alternative for the pupil or adult education student; and,
- (2) with regard to pupils or adult education students,
 - (A) a pupil's or an adult education student's choice to commence, or to continue in, independent study must not be coerced, and
 - (B) in the case of a pupil who is referred or assigned to any school, class, or program pursuant to *Education Code* sections 48915 or 48917, and to the extent that independent study is not prohibited, instruction may be provided to the pupil through independent study only if the pupil has the continuing option of classroom instruction.

(i) "Specific resources" include all resources, including materials and services, reasonably necessary to the achievement of the objectives in the written agreement, and shall not be construed to exclude resources normally available to all pupils or adult education students on the same terms as the terms on which they are normally available to all pupils or adult education students.

(j) "Supervising teacher" means the certificated teacher employed by the school district or county office of education and assigned, as noted in the written agreement, the responsibility for coordinating, evaluating, and providing general supervision of a pupil's or adult education student's independent study pursuant to *Education Code* section 51747.5(a).

(k) "Type of program" means statutory program category for purposes of attendance accounting.

Note also that *Education Code* section 51745 provides:

(c) No individual with exceptional needs, as defined in Section 56026, may participate in independent study, unless his or her individualized education program developed pursuant to Article 3 (commencing with Section 56340) of Chapter 4 of Part 30 specifically provides for that participation.

(d) No temporarily disabled pupil may receive individual instruction pursuant to Section 48206.3 through independent study.

If a temporarily disabled pupil's parent, guardian, or caregiver and the district(s) agree, the pupil may receive instruction through independent study instead of receiving the "home and hospital" instruction provided pursuant to *Education Code* Section 48206.3.

After reviewing all these considerations, the student, parent, and appropriate school staff should be able to assess whether independent study is the appropriate alternative for the student. Then formal acceptance can take place.

F Enrollment Procedures

Initial enrollment can be on an individual or group basis. The first appointment could include the following activities:

1. An overview of the independent study organization, activities, and resources
2. Initial student needs assessment (see Chapter 12 for suggestions)
3. Completion of enrollment forms and master agreements
4. Establishment of curriculum materials to be used
5. Explanation of students' and parents' requirements and responsibilities (see sample master agreements in Chapter 8)
6. Parents' acceptance of their responsibilities

G Additional Considerations

In considering whether home independent study is the appropriate instructional strategy for a child, the parents and supervising teacher would be wise to consider all of the following factors:

1. The child's need for social interaction.
2. Constant closeness between parent and child. Sometimes it is necessary to create a "breathing space" for both the parent and the child.

3. Disputes by those students who feel they know more than their parents. The parent-teacher role can create a tremendous strain on family relationships.
4. The parent's role requires the commitment of a large amount of time. See the list of parental responsibilities under Section D, "Policy Suggestions," in this chapter. Parents may not be trained in or have the ability to implement educational methodology and strategies.
5. Students must have the option of a classroom setting for a full program (not just one period or a part of a day) at the time independent study is made available. This option must be continuously available (not just at the time independent study is chosen) should the student decide to transfer from independent study.

Any parent or participating child may terminate independent study at any time. If a family cannot fulfill the attendance and conference requirements, the staff will assume that the family has chosen no longer to volunteer to be in the program. The staff then needs to help the parent find a more appropriate educational program (*Education Code* Section 51747(c)(7)).

H Curriculum

Chapter 11, "Curriculum and Instruction," provides detailed information and curriculum samples for district and county curriculum development. Methodologies may vary from the complete integration of all subjects into topical studies to the individual presentation of each subject area. The types and variety of direct assistance, monitoring, and evaluation desired and necessary also vary with each student and family.

In negotiating the written agreement, the responsible school representative should focus on the student and the education which should be received via the regular school and classroom-based program. What goes *beyond* this philosophically and religiously is a private concern that may be viewed like after-school hours and weekend education of any student who is in regular attendance at school. The latter is of no concern to the school authority as long as it does not interfere with the student's ability to proceed with learning under an independent study agreement.

I Evaluation of Student's Progress

1. Some possible means of evaluating the student's progress include:
 - a. Completed assignments
 - b. Completed projects
 - c. Demonstration of skills
 - d. Written tests and reports
 - e. Oral or written presentations
 - f. Standardized national tests
 - g. Competency tests
 - h. Student's attitude toward learning and achievement
2. If the student appears to lack progress, other factors that influence learning need to be evaluated. For example:
 - a. Are the student and parent prepared for the scheduled appointment?
 - b. Is the student capable of benefiting from the strategy of independent study?
 - c. Is the learning environment appropriate?
 - d. Is the parent/student relationship enhancing the learning process?
3. The role of the teacher is critical to the success of home independent study. The teacher's observations, discussions with parents and students, and examinations of written work are the key to quality control. The teacher should give guidance and suggestions for improvement to all parents. These include instructional strategies, teaching methodology, and techniques for improving behavior and study skills.
4. Intensified monitoring should take place if a student is considered "at risk." Continual failure or lack of progress may be grounds for ending the student's independent study. At that time the teacher might need to recommend return to the regular classroom or placement in a different alternative educational situation.

J Home Visits

If there is an indication that the family is not successful with home-based independent study, home visits might be appropriate to determine the nature of the problem and to seek solutions. The supervising teacher may visit the student at home for the purpose

of assisting and enhancing the student's educational plan and evaluating the student's progress. Any of the parties concerned can ask questions, and solutions should take top priority. Visiting teachers should make notes of the visits, which will follow the student's progress throughout the school year. The frequency of the visits would be determined by the master agreement and could be adjusted as needed.

K Socialization Activities

Socialization is a concern for the staff and parents alike. It is suggested that students participate in youth groups or organized sports or other activities. Parents also need to function primarily in a parental (not teacher) role.

The school may provide opportunities for the students and parents to learn together. These events could take the form of field trips, workshops, computer laboratories, science fairs, guest speakers, school picnics, and more. Socialization activities may be planned to allow time for parents and children to meet separately with other families who use the home-based mode of independent study strategy, and/or with other friends.

L Support Services and Supplies

Textbooks and all instructional materials that would be made available for classroom-based instruction must be supplied free to students. However, parents may be charged a fee to cover the costs of consumable items that are not normally related to classroom instruction. Each district and county office of education should establish its own guidelines consistent with Section 350 of the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5*.

Other resources that must be made available on the same basis as to classroom students include:

1. Counseling services
2. Student library
3. Parents' resource/supplementary teaching materials library
4. Health services as needed
5. Use of computers and educational software
6. Special opportunities for especially gifted and talented students

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7. A periodic newsletter that contains information about upcoming activities, such as field trips and speakers, suggestions for teaching, reviews of previous activities, schedules of mandated testing dates, current parenting topics, and some showcasing of students' work (written material, artwork, or other display appropriate to the independent study subject)

School supplies that could be provided for each child at the beginning of the school year or at the start of home independent study, if provided to pupils in the classroom, may include:

1. A dictionary
2. Drawing paper
3. Lined paper for writing
4. Construction paper, assorted colors
5. Crayons
6. Pencils
7. A ruler
8. A bottle of glue
9. Others as specified in the student's educational plan

No ADA from independent study may be claimed by a district for a student if it has provided any funds or other things of value to the student or to his or her parent, guardian, or caregiver that it does not provide to students who attend regular classes or to their parents, guardians, or caregivers (*Education Code* Section 51747.3(a)).

M Procedures at Appointments

During a regularly scheduled appointment with the student and parent, the supervising teacher should:

1. Act to maintain a positive working relationship with the student and parent.
2. Review the student's work on the assignment given at the prior appointment to make two separate but related assessments:
 - a. How much of the assignment was completed? (The teacher must assess the work by classroom standards and determine its value for attendance reporting purposes in units equal to full school days, as specified in Chapter 8.)
 - b. What is the quality of the work? (Using the criteria set forth in the written agreement, the

teacher will evaluate the work so as to be able to inform the student about its quality and academic merit.)

3. Make and discuss assignments for the next period of work.
4. Provide direct counsel, information, and instruction to the student and the parent as time allows.
5. Administer any required testing.
6. Review requirements and expectations for the next increment of student work and set the next appointment.

Following the appointment the supervising teacher should make the required computations regarding the student's completed assignments and work products and record the results. Keeping records of the computations is recommended for audit purposes.

N Parent In-service Assistance

Assistance to parents may be provided as specified within a home-based independent study agreement or apart from the agreement, as may be feasible for a group of parents. Some forms of assistance at the initiative of the county office or district may be for groups, while others may be associated with parent initiatives. In most home-based independent study on the elementary level, the parent may be an assistant to the teacher and assumes significant responsibility for supporting and helping the student.

Parent workshops, handbooks, and speaker programs are often vital to the success of each student's program. Some possible topics include, for example, how to do the following:

- a. Develop learning centers.
- b. Use the newspaper and television (including cable and educational television) to integrate the curriculum.
- c. Use teacher manuals and resource guides.
- d. Develop manipulatives, game boards, and games.
- e. Assist students in developing science fair projects.
- f. Organize appropriate field trips and integrate the experience into the daily work plan.
- g. Complete independent study records, assignment sheets, and other necessary paperwork.

- h. Make use of school district, county, and community resources. (A visit to the county media center might be appropriate.)
- i. Network with other parents, possibly by visiting or planning field trips with other elementary programs (regular or independent study).
- j. Integrate the subject matter curriculum.
- k. Deal with the problems of youth (self-esteem, substance abuse, and other relevant topics).

When group in-service programs are not feasible, parents can share ideas and information in the following ways:

- a. Parents tape activities and sessions of reading aloud and share the tapes with others.
- b. Parents who live near each other can work together.
- c. Parents make folders with ideas and exchange folders.
- d. Parents make challenge boxes with a variety of questions and projects used during the year and pass them on for others to use.
- e. Parents could develop a newsletter to mail to all families. The students could write articles and poems to include in the newsletter as well as draw cartoons, illustrate articles, and so on.
- f. Parents could copy public domain computer software and share it when they no longer use the software.

Outside the agreement, parents can enhance their children's education by such activities as may be available, affordable, and appropriate to the child's growth, development, and education, such as private or tutorial instruction, instructional field trips, and other things that may be pursued.

Tips for Scheduling Parent-Teaching Time

1. Schedule time in a way that helps get work done, permits guilt-free recreational time, and improves efficiency.
2. Choose an appropriate place for the study, away from distractions.
 - a. Set up an area with the proper tools: light, desk, dictionary, bookshelf, pencil, paper, bulletin board, and so on.

- b. Work away from the telephone or use an answering machine or voice mail.
 - c. Arrange for the care or entertainment of pre-school children.
3. Develop a long-range home study plan. For example:
 - a. Divide long-range goals and schedule the completion of subgoals. For example, a long-range goal could be completion of an integrated unit. Subgoals would be completion of the first assignment by Wednesday and a work product by Friday.
 - b. Plan ahead for vacation days, field trips, and so on, and adjust your time.
 4. Follow these guidelines for scheduling time:
 - a. Arrange tasks or lessons in order of importance to make sure the most important ones will be completed.
 - b. Plan carefully to allow extra time for creative or time-consuming subjects (drawing, creative writing, and so on).
 - c. Know what your child (and you) can and cannot do and schedule your time accordingly.
 - d. Distribute time through short, daily study periods.
 - e. Determine what time of day your child works best and plan the most demanding or creative subjects for that time.
 - f. Start the day with something the child likes; reward hard work with enjoyable activities saved for last.
 5. Be flexible and be able to adjust the schedule when an assignment takes longer than planned and you have limited time. For example:
 - a. Do only the most important work and reschedule other work for a later time.
 - b. Study material thoroughly to see if there is another way to help present the material more quickly but still maintain the quality of the work.
 6. Consider the other responsibilities of your day before scheduling, such as hours spent with other family members, a job, housekeeping, recreation, relaxation, exercise, and so on. Then fill in the

weekly schedule to include time for other responsibilities as well as the required supervision of the student's study.

P Suggestions for Parents' Daily Study Planning

1. Certificated staff must design lesson plans and write assignments for students. Parents can only *assist* in the educational program, under the general supervision of a certificated staff member. The agreement is with the student; the parent supports and assists the student.
2. Before beginning the work covered by the agreement, examine all books and materials. Become familiar with the teaching aids found at various places in the books.
3. Review the assignments thoroughly in the first group of lessons and plan the work to be covered for the first day and each day of the week.
4. Before beginning instruction each day, plan ahead for each subject. It takes careful planning (and hard work) to keep a child's interest. The most successful days result from careful planning and a careful review of the materials before they are assigned to the student.
5. The attitude and manner in which you approach the schoolwork for the day is very important. Your attitude will set the tone for the day.
6. Young children respond well to activities involving physical or bodily movement and the use of tools; maturing children respond to problem-solving activities and enjoy sharing the activities of people around them.
7. Capitalize on your knowledge of the child's interests and base the introduction of new ideas and activities on those interests. When the child sees or experiences the relationship of a new idea and his or her interests, the child will be more eager to learn that new idea or concept and will retain it for a longer period of time.
8. Since you are in the unique position of knowing in detail the needs and strengths of your child, make adjustments in instruction as necessary.

Slow down the pace if the child has some problem in grasping a concept, or expand on an idea that the child understands quickly. Be sure to explain to a child why it is necessary to learn a subject or concept.

9. Communication is important. A meeting time should be set aside within the daily schedule to discuss the good things of the school day, ways to improve the upcoming lessons, responsibilities, future plans, and any other ideas or problems. This practice encourages the development of oral language, problem solving, and critical thinking skills, among others. You, in the parent role, should merely guide the discussion during these meeting times, talking only when necessary.

Q Pupil Evaluation and Assessment

Pupil evaluation and assessment requirements are the same as those for any other pupil on independent study at the grade level at which the home-based study pupil is enrolled—and the requirements for independent study are the same as those for the regular classroom-based instruction. Independent study is an optional alternative instructional strategy, not an alternative curriculum (see *Education Code* Section 51745(a), and the definition in the *California Code of Regulations, Title 5, Section 11700(c)* in Appendix A).

Pupil evaluation for home-based independent study should be similar, if not equivalent or identical, to the periodic, ongoing, and annual evaluation and assessment procedures applicable to all other pupils enrolled in the district or county office schools. Exceptions or modifications would be justified on the same grounds and by the same process that would apply in the regular school situation. The supervising teacher is personally responsible for assessing all assigned work or work products completed by students to judge the time value and issue credits.

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