

WANT TO HOMESCHOOL BUT DON'T WANT TO TEACH?

Written by Judy Arnall
Published August 2020



This Spring, many of us enjoyed working from home in our pajama bottoms and having leisurely lunch with our kids, then turning them out on the streets with their bikes and skateboards while we got some work done. But many of us are facing indecision for Fall education. For various reasons, many of us do not want to send our children back to the classroom but need more options at home, especially if we don't want to teach. Don't worry, parents and caregivers, you have options!

First, let's talk about the education framework. Education is no longer defined by where it takes place, but by who controls it and who is responsible for it: school or parent. Education is like driving a car. When we have babies, toddlers, and preschoolers, we are in the driver's seat of their education. The kids are in the backseat. The passenger seat is a support role filled by family and friends. We decide what, when, where, and how we teach our little ones. In fact, everyone home-educates their child from birth to age five. The Alberta Government states that parents are the primary decision-maker of their children's education and they control all aspects of it. Half of Canadian parents outsource their children to preschools, but they are still in control of their children's learning. As kindergarten-age approaches, parents sign their youngsters up for school and officially hand over their 'authority' and responsibility for their child's education to a school. By registering, the school becomes the 'authority' over their child's learning. The

parent moves from the driver's seat into the passenger seat and the children are still in the backseat.

This Spring, during COVID-19, parents and media used the term 'homeschooling' but in fact, parents were not in control of their child's learning. The teacher was in the driver's seat. The parents played a support role of encouraging the child to do the 'at-home' schoolwork, the same as enforcing homework when children are in the classroom. This is not homeschooling. This is Distance Education, which is school-controlled. Thus, there are only two ways to educate children in Alberta: Distance Education and Home Education. Distance Education is the legal term for school-controlled learning and the teacher is in the driver's seat. Home Education is the legal term for parent-controlled learning, and the parent is in the driver's seat.

Let's discuss the options in each kind of education delivery so that you can make the decision of which is best for your child according to their age and learning style.

Distance Education

Distance Education includes all of the programs the government delivers through Independent, Charter, Catholic, and Public schools. It includes classroom learning and school-delivered in your living room. It is marketed by many terms: Online, Correspondence, Teacher-directed, BlendED, Ursa, Shared Responsibility, ADLC, Paper-based resource, Aligned, Virtual school, and everything else that is not labeled Home Education. Some programs call it 'homeschooling,' which is not a term used in Alberta Education and that can become confusing to parents. The *Education Act* only uses the term, Home Education, to mean parent controlled. A parent 'registers' a child in a school program and gets out of the driver's seat. The school chooses the curriculum resources, teaches the approximately 1,400 targets per grade of the Alberta Programs of Study, and assesses the child's learning. They report the child's progress through grades and report cards. The school teaches through synchronous or asynchronous online methods through a learning management system or through correspondence booklets. This type of delivery is most effective for children in their teens who have enough executive-function brain development to pay attention and be motivated to attend to the assigned work.

Alberta Education does not recommend online learning for children under Grade 5. Parents are in the passenger seat and support (and enforce) the work to be done and handed in. Most education during the Spring COVID-19 at-home school took this form. Consistent with the authority and responsibility that has been assigned to the schools, the *Education Act* requires that only certified teachers may teach such programs. The advantage of Distance Education is uniformity and government-vetted content.

Home Education

Home Education is parent-controlled education. When parents decide to take back responsibility for their child's education, they must legally 'notify' the government

through a school 'authority,' which enables the parent to slide into the driver's seat. Parents do not ask permission. The school 'authority' then gets into the passenger seat and becomes the school 'partner' to support the parent in providing a home education program for their child.

Funding is available to support Home Education: \$850 per child per year to offset the cost of resources, plus support by the school in the form of loaned resources and certified teacher facilitator help. However, the deadline for the funding application is September 30, 2020, after which date the door for applying for funding or support by the school closes.

In Alberta, Home Education empowers the parent to take back the authority to provide the educational program, but that does not mean the parent has to teach! The parent procures resources for the child's learning. Back to the car analogy, the parent steers to a drive-thru booth to order resources! Parents can hire tutors, freelance teachers, university students, and childcare professionals to help facilitate their child's learning. They can form parent-teaching co-ops. They can access online a-la-carte synchronous courses from websites like Outschool and Khan Academy, and/or they can enrol their child in a non-government whole- package virtual school, like Galileo, from anywhere in the world. The parent might 'outsource' certain topics but remains in the driver's seat and can make changes at any time. The parent decides what, when, where, and how the child learns as well as provides the assessment. They can follow the 1,400 APS targets per grade or they can follow the 22 Home Education targets by the time a child is 20.

Some Home Education parents do the teaching themselves - most parents can teach content up to Grade 8 without teacher's manuals. Children entering their teens can do a good job teaching themselves from textbooks or researching the internet or accessing tutors to continue their studies to high school graduation. Many children do a self-designed high school Home Education program that meets the targets of high school courses but is very personalized to interests. Children on Home Education programs qualify for Alberta Government diplomas, scholarships, and university/college entrance. Home Education may be more suited for elementary grades because of the non-screen, experiential learning benefits and the flexibility for personalized delivery. Some parents empower their children to self-direct their learning by following their natural curiosity and interests. A parent still sits in the driver's seat but has their child on their lap steering the car. This is called Unschooling, a methodology of Home Education. The advantage of Home Education is flexibility, fun, and experiential learning.

Concerned about socialization? Not to worry. Research shows that home-educated children typically enrol in at least eight activities per week and have a diverse set of friends from the community.

Shared Responsibility

Some subjects are the responsibility under Distance Education, and some are the responsibility under Home Education regulations; the parent decides.

This Fall, parents need to know they have options. They can take on the responsibility for their children's education for one year through Home Education and then decide to put them back into the classroom in Fall 2021. There won't be placement testing, and the children will automatically go into the next grade based on their age. Every child will learn due to their innate curiosity. It's all good. We will get through this and our kids will still get an effective education, no matter who teaches them.

*Judy Arnall, BA, CCFE, is a certified brain development and child development specialist and master of non-punitive parenting and education practices. Judy is the bestselling author of five printed books including *Unschooling To University* and *The Happy Homeschooling Alberta Handbook*. She is a mother of five unschooled children of which three are university graduates, one is in university, and one is on the way. For more information on education choices, visit albertahomeschooling.ca. For more information on non-punitive, non-stressful parenting during COVID, visit professionalparenting.ca.*