

# Aligned/Blended versus Traditional Programs: Do you know what you are signing up for?

By Judy Arnall

Many parents sign up for a blended or traditional program without really knowing what they are getting into. Here is some information to help you decide what program is best. Alberta Education only considers “parent-directed, traditional” home educators to be home educating. Other kids on blended, online or correspondence programs are considered public school children that are learning at home under their school board hired certified teachers. A funded blended program is where a certified teacher employed by the school board or accredited private school is responsible for the direct delivery and evaluation of the courses amounting to at least 50% of the student’s program in grades 1-9 and at least 20% of the program in grades 10-12. This is the reason that blended programs offer the parent more funding – because Alberta Education is giving a lot more funding to the school boards to pay for the certified teachers to deliver the program. In return for funding, the teacher must directly instruct the program according to the Alberta Program of Studies Outcomes.

The term, “direct instruction” can be misinterpreted. If your child is “blended” they are expected to attend school and there must be “proof of instruction” delivered by a certified teacher (not the parent), at a minimum amount of hours. For example, for grades 1 – 6 Language Arts, the hours of instruction per year is about 238 hours. Math and Science is about 143 hours and Social Studies is about 95 hours. This means that the teacher is responsible for teaching the blended portion, not the parent. “Just because the teacher and student both have access to a computer, telephone and fax machine, does not constitute adequate instruction. There has to be demonstrated proof of significant pedagogical interaction between teacher and student (ie proof of instruction) which some correspondence and online courses can provide to us.” Says John Gunraj, Alberta Education, 04/2006. The exchange of one or two emails asking “what is Johnny doing?” is not “instruction”. “For example, in online course delivery, attendance may be virtual, but the school has to provide evidence of instruction and evidence that they have and are using the infrastructure needed for online delivery. Logging on in the morning and then logging off in the evening after a great day during which you may have seen a really great show on The Learning Channel, that your teacher assured you ‘followed the Alberta Program of Studies’ would not constitute instruction.” Says John Gunraj.

Here is an analogy that may make the distinction clearer.

## Aligned/Blended Program

Imagine the aligned program is a like a school classroom. The certified teacher sits in the teacher’s chair and the children are doing the schoolwork mandated by Alberta Education and covers the Alberta Program of Studies. The parent is the volunteer aide, unpaid, and under the teacher’s supervision. While the teacher is out of the classroom, having coffee, the parent volunteer sits in the certified teacher’s chair and assumes the role of the teacher while she is out. Now, imagine a child having trouble with an assignment or refusing to write an essay.

Is the government and administrators going to come and fire the parent volunteer? No. Will they hold the parent volunteer responsible? No. Do they expect the parent volunteer to document what was learned and what wasn't? No. Will they take away the resources (funding) in the class because the child isn't learning? No. Will they supervise the paid teacher closer and figure out what is wrong with the teaching methods? Perhaps. Will they kick the child out of the class and tell the parent to homeschool him? (For example, asking the parent to drop down to traditional instead of aligned) Not on your life! The certified teacher will come back and assume control of the classroom and the parent volunteer aide, who has been helping the teacher, will be back in the volunteer role on the side.

The teacher will continue to mark the assignments that the parent handed out and which the parent provided tutoring on. The teacher will gather the assignments that the parent volunteer facilitated on their behalf while the teacher was having coffee, and will submit them to the government as evidence of their teaching the curriculum. If there is no evidence of teaching/learning, the teacher, and school board will be answerable to Alberta Education. Not the parent volunteer aide.

When you are homeschooling on a blended or aligned program, you are the parent volunteer aide. All you do is help the paid teacher carry out her work. You are not responsible for delivery, assessment or even documentation! That belongs with the teacher, the administrator and the school board. Alberta Education funds the school to pay for the teacher, (not the parent volunteer aide) classroom, resources and administration and therefore expects all to follow its mandated Alberta Program of Studies. **No school board should ever pressure parents on a blended, aligned or teacher-directed course that the parent is "not doing enough." This is an unethical breach of the division of responsibilities in the teacher delivered program that is funded by Alberta Education.**

### **Traditional Program**

In the above analogy, the parent pulls the child out of the school and takes them home or in the community. The parent and child decide which philosophy, curriculum, and goals will be met in the year. The parent can use whatever resources they choose. The parent is totally responsible to Alberta Education for meeting the targets in the *Schedule of Learning Outcomes for Students Receiving Home Education Programs That Do Not Follow the Alberta Programs of Study*

The School board gets some funding and has to share half the amount with the parent. The parent is responsible to Alberta Education for the planning, delivery and evaluation of the Traditional program. The certified teacher is only responsible for ensuring that the child is progressing toward the goals set out in the above Learning Outcomes. No marks will be given. The parent is free to choose the methods of delivery, and the resources used as well as the evaluation of the program.

Hopefully, this will help parents decide what type of program is beneficial for their families.

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