

Purpose of the Home Study Allowance

1. Q: When will the revised NDSP home study guidance go into effect?

A: All home study purchases made for the 2021-22 school year will be reimbursed according to the updated guidance.

2. Q: Why is an Education Allowance paid?

A: 20 United States Code (USC) 926(b) provides the basis for the DoDEA to support school-aged dependents in overseas locations where there are no DoD-operated schools. This same provision requires the NDSP to align with the Department of State Standardized Regulation (section 270) to the maximum extent practicable. As a result, and only for dependents eligible for the NDSP, is there a home study education allowance. While DoD-connected dependents can homeschool in locations where the DoDEA operates schools, they are not afforded an education allowance to do so.

The education allowance is intended to assist employees to meet the extraordinary and necessary expenses incurred by reason of service in a foreign area, not otherwise compensated for, in providing an adequate elementary or secondary education for their dependent children. Reimbursement is limited to costs for educational services normally provided free of charge in U.S. public schools and for the purpose of the newly established guidance, the reimbursement is based upon that which is at no cost to a public school student in the District of Columbia or one of the adjacent counties in Maryland or Virginia (referred to as the DMV).

While the law does not specifically discuss home study/private instruction/virtual schooling, it is in the best interest of the United States Government (USG) to ensure students enrolled in a home study course, private instruction or virtual schooling in a foreign

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area are able to reintegrate into a public education system when they return to the United States.

3. Q: What is the education allowance amount allowed for home study/private instruction/virtual schooling?

A: The annual maximums, which are for grades K-6 and grades 7-12, respectively, are currently in alignment with the Department of State's posted allowance and for home study it is \$10,500 and \$21,500. However, the maximum amount reimbursed for allowable expenses cannot exceed the "at post" education allowance listed in DSSR Section 920 when the school/grade at post is considered adequate and that maximum rate for school at post is less than the applicable maximum rate for home study/private instruction/virtual schooling.

Note: A separate education allowance for children with special needs qualifying under PL-105-17, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA), is available ages 3-21. The maximum education allowance rate for home study/private instruction/virtual schooling of children with special needs is shown at DSSR 274.12c.

4. Q: Why can't a sponsor receive full funding of the home study allowance?

A: The education allowance can only be used to reimburse items authorized by the statute. Additionally, the Education Allowance is not currently subject to Federal Income Tax and for that reason is a reimbursement for necessary expenses.

Congress requires an accounting of all allowances from agencies approximately every five years. If an employee were given an amount of money without documentation this could move their allowance to taxable income. It is not so simple as to just advance this allowance. Regulations for government funding which result in personal property require a burden of proof given that the U.S.

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taxpayer is ultimately paying for items that will result in the sponsor's personal property.

5. Q: Can a sponsor be reimbursed for expenses incurred prior to arrival at his/her foreign post of assignment?

A: No. Reimbursement may not be received prior to the sponsor and dependent's arrival at a foreign post. After the dependent is authorized and has arrived at the foreign post of assignment, Home Study Reimbursement Worksheet may be filed to receive reimbursement of allowable expenses.

New Terminology/Requirements

6. Q: The home study guidance refers to age/grade appropriate. What does age/grade appropriate mean?

A: The policy refers to age/grade appropriateness as it relates to academic programs and/or materials. Most vendors provide an age recommendation and while we recognize that these are not concrete. The NDSP generally would consider within a 3-year age/grade range to be appropriate. If the parent deems an item appropriate that is outside of this range, then the education plan can be used to justify.

7a. Q: Why does the NDSP require that the academic program aligns with what is provided to students in public schools in the District of Columbia, Maryland, and/or Virginia (DMV)?

A: To align with the requirement in USC Title 20, 926(b) which requires the NDSP to follow the Department of State to the maximum extent practicable, the revised policy includes this language. It should be noted that the requirement is in comparison to the curricular standards in the DMV, not the homeschool requirements/laws.

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In addition, this provision supports parents by providing curricular standards that are rigorous and will support the transition back to the U.S. While we respect that families have the autonomy to choose the academic program that is appropriate for their child, it allows a fair/consistent approach to determine what is an adequate education program. It is the USG responsibility to ensure continuity of education for dependents especially as they plan for post-secondary endeavors.

7b. Q: What if I've been providing my home state's curricular standards for home study, can I continue to provide my home state's guidelines or am I going to be required to convert to guidelines and standards for the DMV?

A: As long as the state's curricular standards are *similar to or equivalent to* guidelines and standards in the District of Columbia or one of the adjacent counties in Maryland or Virginia (referred to as the DMV), then this would be allowable. It is recommended that you review the grade level standards for the DMV and ensure that your selected state's standards align with the DMV. The education plan allows for justification for the use of a different set of state's curricular standards. A specific example of when a different state would be appropriate is if you are PCS'ing to that state after the OCONUS tour and you want to ensure that your high school student is on track for graduation in that state.

8. Q: What is the intent of the required documentation for families choosing the home study option?

A: The intent of required documentation is two-fold. (1) Fiduciary Requirement: Homeschooling in the United States and DoDEA-operated school locations is a personal choice; however, the main burden of expense is on the parent. Whereas, in a NDSP location there is an education allowance available. As with any federal government funding, it is a minimum requirement to demonstrate evidence of appropriate and necessary use of funds. For this reason, the NDSP requires the Reimbursement Tool and requisite receipts.

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(2) Educational/Academic Requirement: It is typically a requirement in the U. S. for homeschooling families to provide evidence of an adequate education that is commensurate with local standards. For this reason, the NDSP requires the Education Plan.

9. Q: Has the reimbursement process changed? Can you please explain the reimbursement process?

A: The process has been streamlined and a new tool created. The process is as follows:

- Carefully review the Allowable and Non-Allowable Expenses prior to completing your claim.
- File as needed but not more often than once a month after services have been provided.
- File an individual claim for each child since each has their own education allowance.
- All invoices and receipts must be in English. Translations may obtain through Military One Source.
- Required documents for reimbursement: Claim, Invoice, Receipt/Proof of Payment

10. Q: How long should the reimbursement process take?

A: The NDSP request 30 business days to process payments.

11. Q: What is the deadline for submitting the Home Study reimbursement worksheet?

A: The reimbursement worksheet should be submitted no later than the end of the fiscal year (September 30) for schooling completed within the past 12-month period.

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12. Q: What is the education plan and what is its purpose? Do I have to resubmit a new plan if I already submitted a plan for the 2021-22 school year.

A: The education plan has always been an annual requirement for Home Study families. The change is in the content of the plan. The plan will be available in the month of July on the [NDSP website](#). Yes, we are asking that all home study plans be in the new format since there are new components included. The new requirements include:

- A description of the curriculum and requisite materials for each course.
- Self-certification that the parent will monitor progress; ability to assess End-of-Year Outcomes; and that the child is on target for high school graduation (grades 9-12).
- Self-certification that the child is in a recognized and accredited virtual schooling program (if applicable).

13. Q: Am I allowed to develop my own home study program, or do I have to use one of the listed recognized/accredited programs?

A: A parent has the autonomy to develop a program appropriate for their child which could include blending various programs and/or online courses. However, a purchase may not be duplicative, and it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that the home study program meets the curricular standards in the DMV. The education plan is used to articulate the academic program selected by the parent. It should also be noted that the education allowance may not cover the costs of all materials and as such, it is the responsibility of the parent to ensure that all materials are specifically aligned to the course of study and necessary.

Changes to Allowable/Non Allowable Expenses

14. Q: What are the major changes to the allowable and non-allowable?

A: The NDSP website contains the full list of allowable expenses. Most of the allowable/non allowables are consistent with the prior guidance. Below are the noted changes:

- Materials/activities must be available to the student at no cost in public schools within the DMV.
- Purchases must be specifically aligned to a specific course and required for completion of the curriculum.
- Specialty materials and collectibles are disallowed.
- Materials may not have a broader than educational use.

15. Q: When will these changes go into effect?

A: All purchases made for the SY 2021-22 will be reimbursed according to the new Home Study guidance.

16. Q: The new guidance mentions the use of private instructors. When is a private instructor allowable?

A: A private instructor is allowable under specific conditions and must be requested by the parent for an education specialist to authorize. The criteria includes: (1) the rationale for the instructor which must be need based (such as when the parent cannot provide the instruction due to the complexity of the content-i.e. chemistry, Calculus, advanced Foreign Language) (2) the program must be recognized and accredited program of study in a setting other than a school and in a nonsynchronous mode of delivery in a core course. The list of programs can be found on the [Department of State website](#). (3) The instructor does not have to be certified, but must be able to adequately teach the course of study and not be otherwise employed by the parent for any other purpose,

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including childcare. (4) The parent request should indicate the specific course for the private instructor to teach the content and the recommended amount of time. The education specialist will validate the request and ensure that it is commensurate with the amount of time provided to students in public schools within the DMV for the same grade level and course.

17. Q: Can I rent a computer, laptop or tablet which will be used for my child's schoolwork?

A: Yes. This is consistent with the former policy. Electronic devices and other rentals such as: computer, laptop, and/or other electronic devices; and band instruments not resulting in ownership, which would normally be provided in the DMV.

18. Q: What is allowable for PE, Music, Art courses?

A: Group classes/online classes are allowable if they meet the following criteria: (1) commensurate with the time allocations for a child in the U.S. (not to exceed 2 hours per week for K-6; 4 hours per week for 7-12) and (2) are generally available to public school students during the regular school day in the DMV at no charge and (3) are not a competitive sports team or specialized activity.

It is typically the expense of the parent for their child to participate in competitive sports teams in the community in the United States and this is not an allowable expense. Whereas, if there is an After School program which allows the student to participate on a team, but there is a cost not normally assessed to enrolled students at said school, then that cost may be reimbursed.

Some examples of allowable classes/activities available online or in the community for PE, Music, Art would be group art/painting classes, group music classes, group dance classes, group instruction of a sport, group martial arts. Non-allowable examples would include the fees for a competitive team, tennis team, swimming team, horseback riding, sailing or private instrumental lessons.

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19. Q: Can you please clarify what constitutes a group for group PE/Music/Art classes?

A: A group may be defined as at least two persons. Siblings can establish a group.

20. Q. What is meant by manipulatives/supplemental materials?

A. Specific materials such as books or mathematics manipulatives required to teach a specific course of study. Courses of study, such as STEM (science-technology-engineering-math) may have required materials, but please ensure that the items purchased are specifically aligned to the course of study/curriculum and are not broader use.

21. Q. When is an item considered to have broader use than the course of study?

An item must be specifically tied to the core curriculum/course of study otherwise they are considered to have broader use. Before ordering, the sponsor/parent should ask him/herself (1) is the item necessary to teach the course/program of study? (2) would this normally be provided free of charge to a student in the majority of DMV public schools? 3) would this item be given to the student at a DMV public school to be taken home at the end of the course, resulting in ownership? Several factors are considered in whether a homeschooling expenditure can be reimbursed. A processor will first look to the language in the regulation to determine if an expense is allowable or prohibited from reimbursement. In general, items that have a broader use beyond a specific academic purpose or are not given to a student free of charge in a DMV public school are not allowed for reimbursement. A processor may also deny an expense reimbursement if it is not relevant to the curriculum or courses being studied but will seek guidance from the NDSP education team as education experts for clarification.

Supplemental materials are reimbursable expenses when clearly tied to the course requirements (example: British Literature, Shakespeare's Plays) and can clearly demonstrate that they are

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necessary and intended for the specific course of study. Whereas games, such as Connect Four, are not specifically tied to a course of study and could have broader use even though they may have an educational purpose.

22. Q: What is meant by supplies? These are listed as Non-Allowable expenses.

A: This is a continuation of what has always been in policy. Items typically purchased by parents in most public schools include supplies such as binders, composition books, notebooks, pens, pencils, markers, crayons, paint sets, paper, rulers, facial tissue, hand sanitizer and scientific calculator.

23. Q: How can I ensure that my expenses claimed are allowable?

A: When claiming expenses, you should first review allowable and non-allowable expenses. Your Home Study Education Allowance Reimbursement Worksheet and Education Plan should note which core curriculum course(s) pertain to the items on your list of claimed expenses. The templates will be available in July on the NDSP website. If you still are not sure, please reach out to our team to inquire before making the purchase.

24. Q: What is the appeal or resubmission process for an incomplete or denied claim?

A: If a sponsor/parent feels that an item has been inappropriately rejected, then the sponsor/parent should resubmit the completed claim and/or how the claimed expense relates to a course or courses being studied. If it is not reconciled with the resource management processor and/or the sponsor believes that the claim requires an official appeal, then an Exception to Policy may be filed for an official review. Exceptions to Policy process can be found on the NDSP website.