

# Portfolio Evaluation

Until 1994, home education was a legal option in West Virginia only for those students who could score at or above the 40th percentile-the upper two-thirds of the “average” range and higher on achievement testing. Neither were children with learning disabilities or others who could not test well able to be taught at home. In the 1994 legislative session, the portfolio evaluation option was gained, which opened home education to all families who would choose to do so. In 2003 the legislature made several changes to the homeschooling law, some of which impacted the portfolio option.

The West Virginia Code does not specify guidelines for the development of the portfolio, and neither does CHEWV desire to set forth such guidelines. The information we provide is in response to the many questions and requests from CHEWV members to publish information that may be helpful in the development of a portfolio that would meet the requirements specific to West Virginia law. It is intended only as a recommendation to broaden your knowledge in preparing a unique and useful assessment tool.

## **Establishing Standards and Criteria**

West Virginia law requires that your evaluator indicate to the county superintendent that your child is working at his ability level. You and your evaluator should agree on how the ability level is to be determined. Once this has been established, you and your evaluator should clarify the skills and abilities that are expected at your child’s academic ability level. Documents such as state curriculum frameworks, scope and sequence charts from curriculum publishers, or lists as to what a child needs to know at particular grade levels will provide helpful guidelines. A book that may also prove helpful is *What Your Child Needs to Know When* by Robin Scarlata. She has analyzed the objectives and scope and sequence for several achievement tests and has developed a grade-by-grade, subject-by-subject list of what a child could be expected to know.

## **Developing the Portfolio**

Portfolios are developed by collecting information that is relevant and meaningful toward creating a picture of your child’s academic progress. The portfolio should contain materials for evaluating each of the subject areas and should include a wide range of student work, including both typical and best work. A collection of only best samples would not provide an adequate basis for evaluation. Basically, the portfolio should contain student work, checklists, and anecdotal notes.

### **Samples to include in a portfolio**

- Activities that demonstrate the completion of a topic of study, such as a report
- Projects (or photographs of the projects) on topics of study
- Graphs of reading or math drill rates
- Audio cassettes of oral reading
- Video cassettes of oral presentations
- Worksheets or workbook pages
- Teacher-made tests
- Written compositions and/or journals
- Reading lists
- Parent/teacher observations and anecdotal records

### **Choosing an Evaluator**

The evaluation is to be done by a certified teacher and the certification number is to be submitted along with the narrative. Certification should be at your child's grade level, and special needs children should be evaluated by someone certified in special needs.

The evaluator will ultimately determine what specifically he/she will want to look at in order to make an evaluation of the progression of skills. Therefore, it would be prudent to make contact with your evaluator early in the school term and work together in preparation of the portfolio.

### **Submitting the Narrative**

The West Virginia Code specifies that a narrative is to be provided to the county superintendent indicating that a portfolio of samples of the child's work has been reviewed and that the child's academic progress is in accordance with the child's abilities. The narrative should incorporate an accounting of the child's academic progress in relation to his ability level. While one portion of the portfolio may be evaluated at a particular ability level, other subject areas may require evaluation at other levels. West Virginia law does not require evaluation of social experiences. Your evaluator should focus solely on academic progress.

The narrative is to include a statement about the child's progress in the areas of reading, language, mathematics, science and social studies and is to note any areas which, in the professional opinion of the reviewer, show need for improvement or remediation.

Under any of the four assessment options identified in the state law, if a child does not make acceptable progress for the year, the next step is that the home schooling family "shall initiate a remedial program to foster acceptable progress." So the use of the term "remediation" in the evaluator's directive to note any of the subjects needing "improvement or remediation" raises the question of whether the evaluator, by so doing, is identifying the child as having made unacceptable progress for the year. In order to avoid confusion with county superintendents on this issue, we recommend the following approach.

If the evaluator believes that the student has successfully met the standard of "academic progress in accordance with the child's abilities" for all five subject areas, a clear statement to that effect should be included in the portfolio narrative. This should clearly establish that the evaluator considers the child to have made acceptable progress for the year according to the standard in the law. If the evaluator then goes on to discuss areas needing improvement, we recommend not using the terms "remedial" or "remediation", so as not to confuse the issue of the evaluator's overall assessment of acceptable progress. Conversely, if the evaluator determined that, in his or her professional opinion, the child did not meet the standard of achievement in accordance with ability, a clear statement to that effect would be included, along with identification of the subject areas needing remediation.

Whether you choose achievement testing or portfolio evaluation, the main concern should be how much worthwhile information each will give you in regard to your child's academic progress. Results from your choice should help you evaluate how to move your child along a continuum of skills toward a higher degree of proficiency. Choosing a method simply to meet the requirements of the law in the easiest way possible would be cheating ourselves and our children of some valuable feedback. While parents do know their children better than a portfolio evaluator or a testing instrument, it is natural to be biased and subjective in our evaluations. We invest far too much time, effort and resources into our children's education to overlook an opportunity for evaluating not only our children's progress, but also our teaching methods.

The intent of the Assessment Options handbook is to broaden your knowledge of the assessment methods available to us by West Virginia law. The law is very vague in many areas, and it is not CHEWV's intent to regulate these areas or to give you specifics that you must adhere to. Please consider them as recommendations as you seek and appropriate assessment tool.

### **Portfolio Limitations**

- Managing portfolios is more involved and complex than testing. They require much effort, thought, and detailed work in their preparation.
- Portfolio assessments entail human judgments. The progress of your child's academic skills is at the discretion of your evaluator.
- Weaknesses and learning gaps are more difficult to ascertain because of the nature of the portfolio.

### **Portfolio Benefits**

- Portfolios provide an opportunity to give a broad picture of your child's learning and academic progress.
- Portfolio evaluation enables those who have difficulty with testing to give evidence of academic learning.
- Portfolios do not compare your child with other children.
- Portfolio assembly affords you the opportunity to examine results of your instruction, both in detail and in retrospect.
- Portfolio development assures a built-in audience (the evaluator) for your child, and can be very motivating for him.