

Equal Access

Participation of Homeschool Students in Public School Interscholastic Activities

The Virginia High School League “serve[s] their youth by establishing and maintaining standards for student activities and competitions that promote education, personal growth, sportsmanship, leadership and citizenship.”

Purpose

Home Educators Association of Virginia would like to facilitate a way for Virginia homeschoolers to comply with the intent and spirit of VHSL Student Eligibility Requirements in order to participate in public school interscholastic activities.

Challenges for Homeschool Students

- In an effort to keep below-average students and high-school dropouts from participating on sports teams, league policies categorically eliminate homeschool students.
- Only a small number of homeschool students have the opportunity to play against competitive teams.
- Few homeschool students have the public exposure that leads to college scholarships and other opportunities.

Access Laws, Legislation, and Policy Trends

- So far, seventeen states have passed equal access legislation requiring that public schools allow homeschool student access to classes or sports.
- The following states have passed equal access laws: Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Idaho, Iowa, Maine, Michigan, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Nebraska, North Dakota, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Vermont, Washington, and Wyoming.
- Arizona and Oregon require access only to interscholastic activities.
- Massachusetts and Wyoming high school athletic associations have passed by-laws allowing participation on public school sports teams.
- Typical access requirements include:
 - Compliance with the homeschool law,
 - Meeting the same eligibility requirements,
 - And passing core subjects.
- In the states where access is allowed, typically 3%-5% of the homeschool population participates in interscholastic activities.
- The NCAA unintentionally discriminated against homeschoolers by requiring excessive academic detail for scholarship applications. In 2004 the NCAA changed its application process allowing homeschoolers to present a transcript signed by a parent certifying accuracy and completion of high school.
- In 1999 the Department of Defense (DoD) created an equal access policy for military homeschoolers without requiring enrollment in a DoD school. They made auxiliary services available to military homeschoolers that included academic classes, music, and sports programs.

Access Litigation and Legislation

- The courts are leaving public education matters to the discretion of each state.
- State legislators are passing laws that allow homeschoolers the privilege of access to public school interscholastic activities.
- States that allow participation by homeschoolers have reported no problems and have not attempted to reverse their access policies.

Virginia DOE Statistics

Statistics from the 2006-2007 Virginia Department of Education Report on the Number of Homeschoolers show that:

- There are 26,931 homeschoolers in Virginia.
- Homeschoolers in grades 9-12 total 4,822.

Statistic Significance

- Typically 3%-5% of homeschool students opt to participate in public school activities; based on this, about 145-241 students would be expected to participate in the VHSL.
- With close to 300 public high schools in VHSL, there would be little impact on the high school population.

Academic Access for Virginia Homeschoolers

§22.1-253.13.1(H) allows homeschool access to public school academics on a less than full-time basis. The Virginia statute does not require school boards to develop access policies.

- Homeschoolers may enroll part-time in math, science, English, history, social science, career and technical education, fine arts, foreign language, health, or P.E.
- Schools receive partial funding up to ½ ADM per homeschool student.

Academic Accountability for Virginia Homeschoolers

- Parents must provide the division superintendent with evidence of academic achievement by August 1st each year.
- Parents must submit the results of an independent evaluation or nationally-normed standardized achievement test with a composite score in or above the 4th stanine in order to continue to homeschool.

Reasons for Access

- Every student deserves equal and fair treatment—regardless of where he receives his education. Each student is already a part of our society. Turning out the best-equipped individuals should be everyone's goal.
- Homeschooling parents are members of the community whose taxes fund free public schools, whether or not they elect to use the schools.
- It is not acceptable to exclude homeschool students from other public institutions such as libraries, hospitals, or parks. In the same way they should not be excluded from public schools.
- A student is a student whether he attends a public, private, or homeschool. He should not be denied the advantages of participating in beneficial programs if he meets the qualifications.
- Public schools could benefit from putting together teams from a larger pool of talented players.
- It is just as much in the interest of the Commonwealth of Virginia to help homeschool students develop their full potential as it is to help public school students develop theirs.
- All Virginia children should have equal access to publicly funded facilities and activities.

Conclusion

Home Educators Association of Virginia asks that the Virginia High School League not discriminate against homeschool students based on their educational choice.

We ask that you extend the privilege of interscholastic activities to homeschoolers by considering the enclosed proposal indicating the ways homeschoolers can comply with the Student Eligibility Requirements.

With these revised Student Eligibility Requirements, VHSL will fulfill its purpose to promote personal growth, sportsmanship, leadership, and citizenship—for ALL Virginia students.

*Submitted by Yvonne Bunn
Director of Legislative Affairs
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