

Special Bulletin on Cyber Charter Schools

1/22/02

Introduction

Your help is needed to counter a proposed cyber charter school that would undermine homeschooling freedoms. Your attendance at one of the open houses the school has scheduled around the state between Wednesday, January 23 and February 7 would give you a good chance to express your opposition to the school and would contribute to the grassroots effort to stop it. Please invite others, attend, and express your opposition. The more people who attend, the stronger our message will be.

This Special Bulletin contains the following:

- An email message to send to other homeschoolers, giving a quick overview of the issue.
- **A fact sheet titled "Homeschooling Freedoms Undermined by Cyber Charter Schools." It contains important information on this issue. Please read it.**
- Helpful information that would not fit on the post card, including a letter you can take to one of the open houses to indicate your opposition to WCA.
- A fact sheet titled "How Cyber Schools Threaten Public Schools." Please share copies with people you know who support public schools.

Act Now! Tell Other People

It is very important that as many homeschoolers as possible get this information about cyber charter schools. Please contact as many people as you can. You can explain the situation to them, send them the following email, give them a copy of the fact sheet, or refer them to this web site.

Email message

Subject: Urgent: Homeschools and Charter Schools

This urgent message comes from Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA), a state-wide grassroots homeschooling organization. Please forward it to as many homeschoolers and supporters of homeschooling as you can. Thank you.

Your help is needed to counter a proposed cyber charter school that would undermine homeschooling freedoms. Your attendance at one of the open houses the school has scheduled around the state between Wednesday, January 23 and February 7 would give you a good chance to express your opposition to the school and would contribute to the grassroots effort to stop it. Please attend and invite others. The more people who attend, the stronger our message will be.

The Appleton Area School District (AASD) and Sylvan Ventures are trying to create a cyber charter school for homeschoolers and others called Wisconsin Connections Academy (WCA). It would be a public school supported by tax dollars. Students would learn using computers in their homes. Its goal is to enroll homeschoolers and others

throughout the state. The AASD would receive about \$5,000 from the state per student, much of which would go to Sylvan Ventures. (See WPA Newsletter #70, Dec. 2001, pp. 10-11.)

WCA can afford to use the tax dollars to offer homeschoolers free curriculums, computers, and teaching support. However, because cyber charter schools are public schools and must account for their use of tax money, it would be heavily regulated. Students would be required to demonstrate that they are studying for enough hours to comply with the compulsory school attendance law. As public schools, charter schools are required to comply with the standards set by Goals 2000 and administer state-mandated tests. Some cyber charter schools also require submission of lesson plans and daily reports on students' work. A means may be required to demonstrate that students are not cheating by having someone else do their computer work; surveillance cameras would be one possibility.

This is not homeschooling. It's government schooling inside our homes. But WCA calls it "home schooling," and the general public may agree since students study at home. Thus, WCA would change people's ideas about homeschooling. There would be enormous pressure to require that all homeschoolers comply with the regulations cyber charter schoolers are under. We would lose our good homeschooling law and our homeschooling freedoms.

WCA would also undermine public schools in a number of ways. For details, visit WPA's web site at www.homeschooling-wpa.org and click on Issues and Legislation. Then find "Fact Sheet: How Cyber Charter Schools Threaten Public Schools."

Homeschoolers are being invited to at least 15 open houses around the state from Jan. 23 to Feb. 7 and being offered \$50 gift certificates; see below for dates. (WPA does NOT release names; WCA may have gotten them from curriculum sellers, etc.) Attendees will be encouraged to file a DPI Open Enrollment Application Form so they will be eligible to enroll in WCA in Appleton in the fall. Instead, please attend and object to WCA. Homeschoolers and others who do not object will be giving WCA needed support.

What We Can Do

- We can tell other homeschoolers that cyber charter schools undermine our freedoms.
- As many people as possible are needed to attend the open houses and register their opposition. WPA's web site (www.homeschooling-wpa.org) has more information and a letter you can print and use to express opposition; click on "Issues and Legislation." Acting NOW will give us the best chance of stopping WCA.

• We can inform public school supporters, using the fact sheet on WPA's web site.

Open houses: All meetings are from 7 to 8 PM—1/23 Fond du Lac at the Public Library; 1/23 Manitowoc at the Public Library; 1/24 Oshkosh at the Public Library; 1/24 Sheboygan at the Public Library; 1/28 Janesville at the United Way (downtown), 1/28 LaCrosse at the Public Library; 1/29 Beloit at the Public Library; 1/29 Eau Claire at the Phillips Memorial Public Library; 1/29 Wausau at the Marathon Cty Hist. Society; 1/30 Cedarburg at the Police Department Meeting Rm; 1/30 Green Bay at the Brown Cty Library; 1/31 Waukesha at the Goodwill Building; 2/5 Racine at the Public Library; 2/6 Kenosha at the Municipal Building; 2/7 Richland Center at the A. Keith Library. Details at www.connectionsacademy.org/WI/openhouse.html—Additional open houses may be scheduled.

More About the Open Houses

Please attend an open house if at all possible. This is an excellent opportunity for us to make a strong statement about our concerns and opposition to cyber charter schools. The more people who attend and express their opposition, the stronger our statement will be. We need a way to counter the fact that charter schools are unfairly and inaccurately claiming that they have the support of homeschoolers. For an example, see the last point under “Why We Homeschoolers Need to Oppose Charter Schools” in this document.

Invite other people to attend the open house with you, including other homeschoolers. Also invite non-homeschoolers, especially people who support public schools, such as teachers, school administrators, etc. You can print the fact sheet, “How Cyber Charter Schools Threaten Public Schools” from this web site and share it with them to help them understand the problems cyber charter schools would cause for public schools.

Even though cyber charter schools are public schools and WCA would be a public school, the open houses will not be held in public schools. Instead, most of them will be held in public libraries, no doubt in part so homeschoolers will feel more comfortable. They are scheduled to take place from 7 to 8 pm. There have been rumors that attendees need to make an appointment. However, this is a meeting about a public school, being held in a public building, so you can certainly go without an appointment.

WCA is strongly encouraging parents to fill out DPI form PI-9410 Full-Time Public School Open Enrollment Application Form—2002-2003 School Year. This form is used by students who want to enroll in a school district that is different from the one in which they reside. It must be submitted to the DPI between February 4 and 22, 2002. The only students who will be able to enroll in WCA in the fall of 2002 are those who live in the Appleton Area School District and those from outside the district who have submitted their forms by February 22. This explains why WCA is holding the open houses now. Of course, filing the form is not binding, but parents who file it are supporting WCA by showing interest in it. Please think carefully and encourage others to think carefully before filling out the form.

Letter of Opposition to Take to Open Houses

Below are two versions of a letter of opposition to cyber charter schools. If you have only a few minutes, you can simply print the first letter, sign your name, and deliver it to one of the Wisconsin Connections Academy people at the open house. If you are concerned about disclosing your full name for privacy reasons, simply sign your first name.

If you have enough time to customize a letter, use the second version or write your own.

Version 1: [For a printable form of this letter, see Letter #1]

January, 2002

Wisconsin Connections Academy
Appleton Area School District
10 College Avenue, Suite 214
Appleton, WI 54911

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to inform you that I have come to the Wisconsin Connections Academy open house tonight to express my opposition to cyber charter schools in general and WCA in particular.

When you report to your superiors and/or the Appleton Area School District on tonight's open house, please include this letter. If there is any press coverage of this event, please have the courtesy to mention the fact that some of the attendees opposed WCA.

Sincerely,

Version 2: [For a printable form of this letter, see Letter #2]

Your street address
Your city, state, and zip code
Date of the open house

Wisconsin Connections Academy
Appleton Area School District
10 College Avenue, Suite 214
Appleton, WI 54911

Dear Sir or Madam:

This letter is to inform you that I have come to the Wisconsin Connections Academy open house in //name of city// tonight to express my opposition to cyber charter schools in general and WCA in particular.

When you report to your superiors and/or the Appleton Area School District on tonight's open house, please include this letter. If there is any press coverage of this event, please have the courtesy to mention the fact that some of the attendees opposed WCA.

Sincerely,
//your signature//
Your name

Unfair Treatment of Homeschoolers by Proposed Charter Schools

Proposed charter schools in Wisconsin have already treated homeschoolers unfairly. One school district trying to start a charter school in Wisconsin contacted the Director of a home-schooling support group in that area. (The group is willing to have WPA share their experience but wishes to remain anonymous.) A school district administrator wanted the Director to attend a meeting to "discuss the establishment of a Charter School for home-based educators." At the meeting, the Director and other members of the support group's board "explained to the [school district] Administration that we could not speak for members of [support group] regarding their involvement in a Charter School. We told them that our members must be given the opportunity to speak for themselves. The Administration asked for a copy of our mailing list so that they might contact our members directly. **We explained that it was not our policy to give out our members' names to any organization but that we would accommodate them on behalf of our members if they would prepare a mailing, seal it, and affix postage.**" [Bold in original]

That evening, the Director contacted Superintendent of Schools "at his home to remind him that the [school district] did not have permission to use the [support group]'s name on a grant application in making his presentation before the School Board that evening." The superintendent said "he would make certain that [another administrator] also understood that she could not use our name." The superintendent was very careful in his presentation.

Despite this, the support group's name appeared in the charter school application. It was only after the Director wrote strongly worded letters to the DPI and the School Board that the support group's name was finally removed from the application.

The same charter school application included research on homeschooling that had been done by someone outside Wisconsin. Again it took strong letters from the researcher to the school district and the local paper before the researcher was finally dissociated from the charter school application as the researcher had requested.

Here is further evidence that charter school proponents are willing to use homeschoolers, without our permission and in spite of our opposition, to further their plans and goals.