



Legislative Watch

One of WPA's main functions is legislative watch. We are constantly on the lookout for potential issues that would have an impact on homeschoolers. Through vigilance and hard work we watch, inform, and ask for action when needed. In this way, we are able to head off many issues that could become problematic legislation for homeschoolers before they get a foothold.

In recent years, this has become a more challenging task due to the speed at which certain types of bills are passed, how easy it is to add a last minute amendment that may not be related to a bill, and how much less open to public input the legislative process has become.

In addition, people claiming to support homeschooling freedoms are adding things to legislation that end up doing more harm than good (as we have seen in recent years).

Update: There are currently many issues we are following. Here are a few examples:

1. Homeschoolers playing public school sports—WPA opposed legislation that requires public schools to allow homeschooled students to play public school sports and participate in extra curricular activities. In spite of our efforts, the legislation passed. In other states we are seeing resistance to the notion of homeschoolers playing public school sports, due to the perception that they have an unfair advantage over public school students, or that they are representing schools that they are not members of. In addition, some school districts and community members have expressed concerns about homeschoolers being able to adjust their homeschool schedule around sports, having different academic and disciplinary standards than the public school students they are competing with, and taking positions that people feel should be reserved for members of the school's community.

S. 118.133 1(b) states:

Upon request, the home-based educational program in which the pupil is enrolled shall provide the school board with a written statement that the pupil meets the school board's requirements for participation in interscholastic athletics based on age and academic and disciplinary records. No person may provide a false statement under this paragraph. The school board may not question the accuracy or validity of the statement or request additional information.

This is the first time that homeschoolers in Wisconsin have been asked to provide a written statement to their school district about their homeschool's academic and disciplinary record. If you choose to participate in public school sports, your school district can compel you to provide information that is internal to the operation of your homeschool, and beyond the requirements of the homeschooling law.

At this time, this requirement is in place only for those students that are choosing to play public school sports. Setting this precedent opens the possibility for the increased regulation of all homeschoolers.

We will continue to watch this issue closely.

2. Legislation concerning vaccination waiver—On January 27th of this year, Representative Gordon Hintz (D-Oshkosh) announced that he would be introducing legislation to remove the personal conviction waiver in WI Stat. § 252.04(3).

There was a call for co-sponsorship and then on 2/18/16 it was read and referred to the Assembly Committee on Health. There is one person on this committee that co-sponsored the bill. At this point we are watching to see if AB 924 continues to move forward.

3. Civics exam as a requirement for graduation—Early this year, members contacted us, concerned about a bill they thought would affect homeschoolers. AB 828 offers changes to the 2015 Wisconsin act 55 (passed in July of 2015) and indicates that a civics exam must be administered and a passing score given to private school students participating in a parental choice program before a diploma is granted (with some exceptions for children with disabilities).

This does not currently apply to homeschoolers. However, this is a state-provided test that is now required of non-public school students (in schools accepting government money). This is an example of why, as homeschoolers, we do not want government money. Accepting government money blurs the line between a homeschool and a conventional (public or private) school. Taking government money and/or favors invites regulation and threatens the freedom for each family to homeschool according to their own principals and beliefs.

What can members do? Keys to being successful in maintaining our current homeschooling law

PAY ATTENTION—Members paying attention to the issues and sending us information that they find interesting or concerning is always appreciated. Know what the homeschooling law means and what homeschoolers need to do in order to be compliant. When there is an appropriate opportunity to inform citizens or politicians about what it means to homeschool in Wisconsin and how much we appreciate our current homeschooling law, it is very powerful to do so.

JOIN WPA—The value of a large member base: Many legislators ask WPA representatives how many members we speak for. Joining WPA supports its ongoing work. In addition, your name on our active membership list gives us more influence when we talk with legislators.

BE AN ACTIVE MEMBER—Contacting your legislators, sharing information with WPA, and being a responsible representative of homeschooling is the key to protecting homeschooling in Wisconsin.

Consider

Talking with your legislator at the beginning of each session can build relationships and familiarity that can be very valuable. Introduce yourself and remind your elected representatives that you are a homeschooler. It's easy to talk with legislators when we can tell them that we want nothing but to maintain the good homeschooling law that we have in Wisconsin. We don't want government favors, because with government money comes government oversight.

Who are my legislators? Go to: <http://maps.legis.wisconsin.gov/> In the search bar, enter your address.

What Does it Mean When I Sign the PI-1206 Form?

Personal Responsibility in Homeschooling

Each year when you file the PI-1206, you check a box that says, "By checking this box, I agree that the home-based private educational program meets all of the following criteria."

Each year it is important to read this information and make sure that the homeschool you are administering meets these criteria.

Below is the language from the PI-1206 (italics added for emphasis):

Section 115.001(3g) "Home-based private educational program" means a program of educational instruction *provided to a child by the child's parent or guardian or by a person designated by the parent or guardian. An instructional program provided to more than one family unit does not constitute a home-based private educational program.*"

Section 118.15(4) Instruction in a home-based private educational program that meets all of the criteria under s. 118.165(1) may be substituted for attendance at a public or private school.

Section 115.30(3) The administrator of each home-based private educational program shall indicate in his or her report whether the system or program meets all of the criteria under s. 118.165(1).

Section 118.165(1)

- (a) The primary purpose of the program is to provide private or religious-based education.
- (b) The program is privately controlled.
- (c) The program provides *at least 875 hours of instruction each school year.*
- (d) The program provides a *sequentially progressive curriculum of fundamental instruction in reading, language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and health.*

This subsection does not require the program to include in its curriculum any concept, topic, or practice in conflict with the program's religious doctrines or to exclude from its curriculum any concept, topic, or practice consistent with the program's religious doctrines.

- (e) The program is not operated or instituted for the purpose of avoiding or circumventing the *compulsory school attendance* requirement under s. 118.15(1)(a).

When you sign the PI-1206 you are signing an affidavit that these are the criteria your program meets.

You have a responsibility to your own homeschool and to the homeschooling community to know these requirements and to be able to explain what they mean to other homeschoolers and others in your community. When homeschoolers know the law, are complying with it, and are acting in ways that protect their freedoms, they are less likely to be challenged by school officials and/or opponents of homeschooling.

For more ideas on how to be a responsible homeschooler, see page 263 in the *WPA Handbook*.

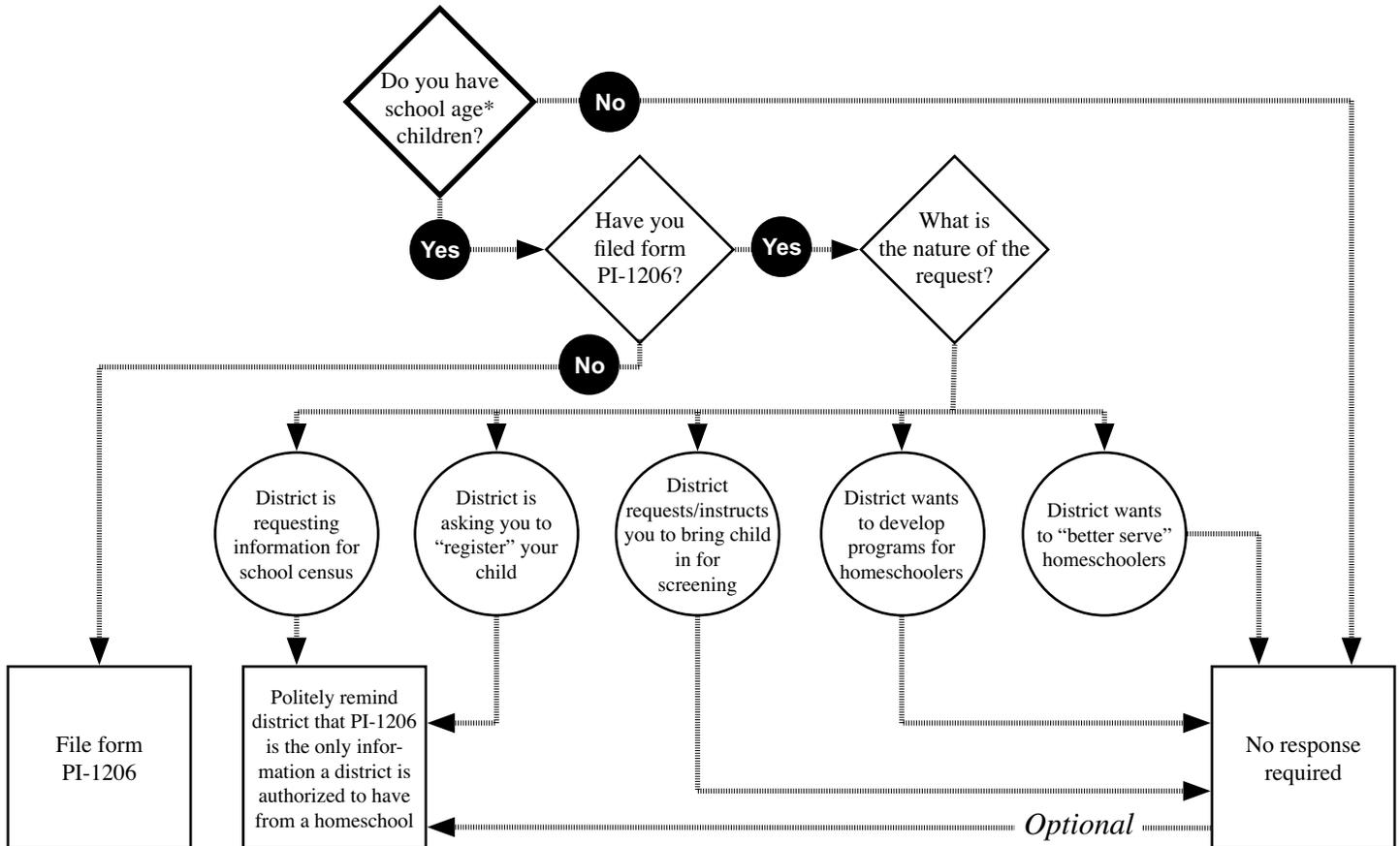
For a listing of all of the laws relating to homeschooling in WI, please see Appendix A in the *WPA Handbook*

Responding to Contact from School Districts

An ongoing issue for Wisconsin homeschoolers is school districts sending surveys, letters and inquiries to homeschooling families requesting information to which they are not legally entitled. School officials and opponents of homeschooling are less likely to challenge homeschoolers who know the law, are complying with it, and are acting in ways that protect their freedoms.

Here is a flow chart to help you understand how you should respond to some of the most common inquiries:

I received a request for information from my local school district. What should I do?



*Defined as age 6 on or before September 1 of the current year.

The information on the PI-1206 form is a report of enrollment. Use of information from PI-1206 forms for purposes other than record keeping is a violation of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).

It takes time and energy to defend our homeschooling rights. Ideally homeschoolers who receive requests like these from their school districts would write letters stating that the district has no authority to ask for this information and also asking not to be contacted by the district again.

Sometimes the contacts from the districts are to inform you about an upcoming screening or enrollment opportunity or asking for ideas on "working with homeschoolers." These are requests that you could respond to or, if you aren't comfortable responding, you can choose not to respond.

If your school district contacts you requesting more specific information (i.e. children's names, ages, health status, or disabilities, parents' occupation, income, etc.) or telling you that you must "register" your child with the school in any way, those are situations that need to be addressed with a letter.

We are all responsible for standing up for our homeschooling freedoms and for acting in ways that protect all homeschooling families in Wisconsin.

It is very helpful to us when our members let us know when these types of contacts are being made. Please send us an email or forward any requests you receive from your school district to wpa@homeschooling-wpa.org.

Obtaining Good Student Discounts on Auto Insurance

Many insurance companies offer discounts for teen drivers who qualify as “good students” according to the company’s criteria (most of the time this is grade point average). Homeschoolers can get these discounts too.

To get a discount, ask your insurance agent what the company requires. This could be a report card or a letter stating the student has a particular grade point average. Parents can then submit a homeschooling equivalent of what is required. It is often a good idea to format your submission like that of a conventional school. You can purchase forms online or create your own.

Under Wisconsin law, the parent(s) or guardian(s) who fill out the PI-1206 form is the administrator of their own homeschool and therefore has the right and authority to create a report card, assign letter grades, etc.

Many insurance companies take this all in stride. In Wisconsin we are fortunate to have had homeschooled students and families set a good precedent.

If your insurance agent seems skeptical, it is probably a good idea to include a cover letter with information to convince the agent that your son or daughter meets the requirements. The letter might include any/all of the following points:

- Many insurance companies grant good student discounts to homeschoolers.
- Under WI statute 115.30 (3) you as the parent/guardian are the administrator of your homeschool and are therefore qualified to sign/submit any qualifying paperwork.
- Many other organizations accept transcripts from homeschoolers, including the federal government (qualification for student loans) and colleges and universities (part of applications for admission).
- It is discriminatory for insurance companies to refuse to grant homeschoolers the same discounts they offer students in public or other private schools. (In Wisconsin, homeschools are private schools consisting of one family unit.)

You can always look for another insurance company that will offer you a good student discount.



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