



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. If you would like to join our Legislative Watch Committee, contact us at wpa@homeschooling-wpa.org.

On June 21st, U.S. Senator Ted Cruz (TX) introduced bill S.3102.

This bill is being proposed to amend the Internal Revenue Code that permits kindergarten through grade 12 educational expenses to be paid from a 529 account. Senator Cruz would like homeschoolers to have access to this program and to be able to use these accounts for their homeschooling expenses.

Last time this proposal was presented, many homeschoolers (including WPA) did not support this change and homeschoolers were left out of the legislation.

Why is this legislation a problem for Wisconsin homeschoolers?

While Senator Cruz (from Texas) is attempting to be helpful to homeschoolers, the biggest concern for Wisconsin homeschoolers is that this allows the federal government to determine what is considered an educational expense by creating guidelines for defining a "qualified expense."

In other states, where homeschoolers have to use state-approved curriculum or specific standardized tests, this may not seem like a problem. However, in Wisconsin, homeschooling parents/guardians are administrators of their homeschool and they alone determine what is considered educational and what type of curriculum they include in their homeschool program.

This bill threatens to define what is considered a legitimate homeschooling expense, limiting the freedom of homeschoolers in Wisconsin.

In addition, if homeschoolers took advantage of this program, they would have to answer to the federal government as well as the state government to show that the homeschooling expenses they claim are acceptable.

Please take a moment and contact your U.S. Senators and your U.S. Representative and let them know that homeschoolers do not support s.3102. (Since this is federal legislation, there is no need to contact your State Senator or Representative at this time.)

Find your U.S. Senators and U.S. Representatives here: <https://whoismyrepresentative.com>

IMPORTANT REMINDER: Please contact your state representatives at the beginning of each legislative session. When you do this, please:

- Be respectful. Even if you disagree with your elected official, there is often an opportunity to find common ground and thank them for something they have done that you do agree with.
- Let them know that you are a homeschooler and their constituent.
- Share with them that homeschoolers in Wisconsin want to preserve our good homeschooling laws.
- Be clear that homeschoolers DO NOT want anything from the State (especially funding and/or to be treated like a special interest).
- Be willing to answer questions about homeschooling or refer them to the WPA website.

This is **one of the most effective things** homeschoolers can do to preserve our current homeschooling freedom. If elected officials know that their homeschooled constituents do not want legislation, they may be less likely to introduce a bill about homeschooling and/or more likely not to support a bill if introduced by others.

How to find your **state** legislators: <https://legis.wisconsin.gov>

What Do I Have to do at the Beginning of the School Year?

File the PI-1206 online annually. This form reports the enrollment in your homeschool as of the third Friday in September. The report is due by October 15th.

For details or a refresher, please see our website at : <https://homeschooling-wpa.org/2016/07/13/when-and-how-to-file-the-pi-1206/>

What do families in other states have to do at the beginning of the school year?

Minnesota

- Report yearly to the school district superintendent their intent to begin or continue homeschooling (this report must include the child's name and date of birth).
- Submit immunization information once when starting homeschooling and again at the start of seventh grade
- Administer and maintain records of instruction and yearly testing of their children (tests must be approved by the state of MN)

Massachusetts

In Massachusetts, each school district sets their own policies on home education, guided by two court cases and the compulsory attendance law. Don't worry, if that seems overwhelming, there is a 14 page document called *Information for Superintendents* that you can read to gain a "common sense explanation of Massachusetts regulations." <http://www.mhla.org/supt/infosupts.PDF>

Ohio

In Ohio, a home-educating parent is required to submit an annual notification to the superintendent of the district of residence. The superintendent then has 14 calendar days to excuse the child or request any missing information. Only the district superintendent may sign the excusal letter sent to the parent.

The parent's notification of home education must include:

- Name, address and signature of the parent or guardian
- Name and birthdate of the child
- An assurance that the home education will include 900 hours of instruction in the following, unless the topic or practice conflicts with the religious beliefs of the parent: Language, reading, spelling and writing; Geography, history of the United States and Ohio, and national, state, and local government; Mathematics; Science; Health; Physical education; Fine arts, including music; and First aid, safety and fire prevention.

The application must also include:

- A brief outline of the intended curriculum
- A list of teaching materials
- Assurance the home teacher has a high school diploma or the equivalent or is working under the guidance of a person holding a bachelor's degree
- An assessment report, if the notification is a continuance from the previous year.

Aren't you glad you live in Wisconsin? Protect our amazing law.

1. **Know the history** of homeschooling in Wisconsin and why homeschooling in Wisconsin is unique.
2. **Know the law** and homeschool responsibly. Do what is required of homeschoolers and no more.
3. **Do not push** for additional legislation for homeschoolers. Legislation is often amended and rarely passes in the condition that it was introduced.
4. **Do not ask** for favors from the government. Favors and money from the government come with additional regulation.
5. **Contact** your legislators regularly.

Communicating With New Homeschoolers

By Colleen Manning, Question Answering Committee Coordinator

Homeschooling has become more widely accepted in recent years, and it seems more families than ever are considering it. The reasons they are considering it, however, seem to be changing. The educational choices available today have also changed, in the public system, in private education, and, in some states, in home education. How do we as homeschool parents communicate clearly with prospective homeschool families so they have the information they need about Wisconsin homeschool law?

First, **understand the definition of homeschooling in Wisconsin.** Know the Wisconsin statutes that relate to homeschooling. If you are clear about what home-based private education is, you won't be confused by other options that don't fit the definition. Also, understand some of the questions that people may ask by reading through sections of WPA's [website](#). If you know what is available there, you can easily and confidently give answers to new families or help them find the information themselves.

Second, **encourage new homeschoolers to read the Wisconsin statutes** that relate to homeschooling. The more they understand Wisconsin law, the better prepared they are to homeschool responsibly and to help uphold our good homeschooling law. Encourage use of WPA's website, signing up to join the free email list, and becoming members. If every new or prospective homeschool parent would read the WPA website and newsletters, many questions would already be answered.

If a parent seems to be misinformed, don't avoid the issue, but **ask questions to clarify** what the misunderstanding is. Be calm and polite while you share any accurate information they are missing. If a heated discussion begins, remember that you are trying to shed light, not just heat.

Stick to the simple facts of the law to avoid being misinterpreted. When in doubt, consult the WPA [website](#) or contact a WPA volunteer through the *Questions?* link.

Be a good listener. If you listen to parents' ideas, questions, and concerns, you can give information that fits their situation. Find common ground with them, pointing out things their family does that are similar to ways homeschool families learn—reading books together, taking trips to interesting places, and cooking together are just a few of the possible interests you have in common. You can build their confidence by pointing out ways they have already been helping their child learn from birth. A homeschool family simply continues growing and learning together through the school years.

You may feel that some families seem less committed to homeschooling than you and your friends did when you started. They may be planning to homeschool for only a short period, or may not be homeschooling all of their children. They may tend to rely on public school programs, expensive curriculum, early education, or school-like group activities more than other families you know. Keep in mind that some families who begin homeschooling with those ideas become more committed as they experience homeschooling for themselves. **Be willing to meet them where they are.**

If you sense that parents are not willing or prepared to take on the full responsibility of educating their children, homeschool might not be the best choice for them. **Consider discussing alternative options.** A helpful page at our web site is titled, [Is Homeschooling Right for Me?](#)

New homeschooling parents might not understand what a lifestyle of learning looks like. **Try to focus on positive aspects of homeschooling,** rather than negative aspects of other forms of education. Find ways to share that homeschooling works, perhaps by telling a meaningful story about your family's experience. You may know of a local support group that supports non-traditional ways of learning. Just spending time with other homeschool families can help parents see that different ways of learning are effective and fulfilling.

New homeschooling parents probably don't understand the history of Wisconsin homeschooling. They may not understand how much freedom we have to make decisions as administrators of our homeschools. They also may not understand some of our responsibilities under Wisconsin law nor how our laws differ from those of other states. The first step to becoming a responsible homeschool parent is to read the state laws. **Reading the summary of our [history](#)** that is included on WPA's website is another step toward understanding the reasons for our homeschool statute and how to help protect it.

If parents have further questions after searching for answers on the WPA site, feel free to recommend that they call or email WPA using the *Questions?* page.

You can **reach out to others** in so many ways: sharing posts from WPA's [Facebook page](#); promoting our publications and website; showing up at local homeschool events to meet new families; being a friend with a listening ear; inviting families to homeschool groups that support a lifestyle of learning; and sharing accurate information about Wisconsin homeschool law. By communicating clearly, you and your family can work together with WPA to keep Wisconsin homeschool families strong and growing. Thank you in advance for the creative ways you will find to spread positive news about WPA.

The Future Must Be Unity

Reflections from our President and Executive Director

The homeschooling environment has changed in recent years. In the past, families have chosen homeschooling as an opportunity to move towards a way of life and educational philosophy that best suited their families. Today, many families choose homeschooling because they want to move away from what their children are experiencing in traditional institutional schools. Instead of choosing homeschooling as a lifestyle for their family, many people now choosing homeschooling are feeling pressured to escape from mainstream education. This change from “towards” to “away from” has drastically altered the landscape of homeschooling from a unified constituency to a disparate conglomeration of people, some of whom really don’t want to be there.

Another factor in the changing homeschool environment is that homeschooling has become big business. National companies and “experts” that provide information, curriculum, and/or classes to families who fear they may not be able to adequately cover these materials themselves, are adding to confusion of what is legal under Wisconsin’s current homeschooling laws. Products and services being sold may be legal in some states, but are not in others causing confusion both for homeschoolers and legislators as the products and programs gain popularity.

Adding more layers to the confusion and division amongst homeschoolers is the environment of instant communication through modern technology. Instead of researching homeschooling and reading statutes for themselves, families often ask a question on a social media platform, getting answers that contradict each other and are often incomplete or incorrect. Inaccurate information spreading quickly is incredibly divisive to homeschoolers in Wisconsin and one of the biggest threats to homeschooling freedom, since legislators, the media, school officials, and the general public may not be familiar with the facts or where to find them.

These are some of reasons that homeschoolers here in Wisconsin are finding themselves divided. When the homeschooling law was passed, in order to be successful, homeschoolers had to come together in unity and focus on their common goals. Today homeschoolers are focusing more on what works for their family *only*, sometimes losing sight of the bigger picture—how what they want may affect homeschooling families all over the state for years to come.

WPA has faced many challenges to the unity that made passing the homeschooling law here in Wisconsin possible, from the option to take two public school classes to recent legislation that allows school district oversight of homeschoolers who choose to participate in sports and/or extra curricular activities at the public schools. Now we face legislators wanting to help homeschooling by offering public dollars and/or more favors. We have groups that blur the lines between private schools (providing an educational program to multiple families) and home based private educational programs (providing an educational program to one family). We have people (with the best of intentions) spreading information that is not accurate. And, we have people that believe that homeschoolers should receive public dollars to support their private programs.

For more than 30 years WPA has helped homeschoolers come together to look at the big picture and fight for the rights of all parents to choose an education for their children according to their own principals and beliefs. The following WPA resolution, passed in 1990 is, in many ways, even more important today. As homeschooling becomes more accepted in mainstream culture, it becomes more and more likely that if we allow ourselves to be divided, we will end up facing more regulation, which may work well for a few, but will absolutely restrict the rights of many.



9. Unity Among Home Schoolers*

Whereas home schoolers come from all walks of life; they home school for a number of different reasons; and they use a variety of curriculums and approaches to education; however, they all have one thing in common, namely, their determination to preserve the right to choose for their children an education consistent with their beliefs and principles; and

Whereas the Wisconsin statutes defining private schools (including home schools) resulted from the hard work of the full range of home schoolers and people involved in other small private schools in this state; and

Whereas home schoolers have organized themselves as Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA) to watch and protect their parental rights in education, especially home schooling rights and responsibilities; and

Whereas WPA has steadfastly refused to take any position on approaches to education, religion, moral values, and has fought for the rights of its members and others to make their own decisions in these matters; and

Whereas it is not necessary for home schoolers to agree on educational approaches or religious and moral beliefs and principles in order to work together to secure and preserve the rights and freedoms all home schoolers need in order to make choices; and

Whereas home schoolers are a small minority and are opposed by powerful political interest groups and organizations; and

Whereas Wisconsin has a reasonable home schooling law; and

Whereas the unity of home schoolers on home schooling legislative issues has earned home schoolers respect in the Wisconsin Legislature and has worked to prevent unnecessary regulation of home schoolers; and

Whereas WPA is a grassroots organization which relies on the strength of its own local members rather than “experts,” especially out-of-state experts who become involved in state legislative matters;

Be it resolved by members of Wisconsin Parents Association (WPA) that WPA affirms its goal of assuring reasonable home schooling laws by working together as a united group that is open to all home schoolers; and

Be it further resolved that WPA opposes any state or national efforts that would split home schoolers into factions and thus weaken the ability of home schoolers to ensure reasonable home schooling laws.

Resolution passed at Annual Member Meeting April 1990

*In the early years of WPA, a resolution was passed at each annual meeting in an effort to solidify the shared foundation of the organization’s purpose. This was the 9th resolution passed by the general membership.

When this resolution was passed in 1990, the word “homeschooler” (no space) was not yet in common use.



Is it Discrimination?

By Jodi Buntin, WPA Vice President

“Discrimination against homeschoolers” makes a great click-bait headline, but is it really or always discrimination? Or is there something else going on? It depends. Usually it is important to learn the rest of the story.

With stories about “homeschooling discrimination,” how can you determine if it is actually a case of mistreatment of homeschoolers or a misunderstanding or misrepresentation of what is really going on?

- Read the story, research other sources of information about the situation, and find out if the family was in compliance with their state’s homeschool law. **If they were in violation of the law, it is not discrimination**, but rather a case where they need to take appropriate actions in order to become compliant with the law.
- If homeschoolers are being excluded from certain activities, check the applicable statute or policy. **If homeschoolers are to be included and are being denied, there is a possible case of discrimination** (although in WPA’s experience, it is usually the result of misunderstanding the statute or policy, and the situation is often resolved quickly).
- **If it appears that homeschoolers are being treated differently than others, check the applicable statute or policy to see if this is the case.** A recent example is the revelation that the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) retains PI-1206 forms for seven years. A search through the applicable statutes found that other than individual student records (which must be retained permanently), the standard retention time frame for most records, including enrollment reports (which is the type of record the PI-1206 falls under), is seven years, so in this case, homeschools were not discriminated against, but rather treated the same as public and other private schools.

What should you do if you have experienced true discrimination as a homeschooler?

It is always best to try to work out these issues directly with the other party, and to do so in a calm, respectful manner. **Before contacting the other party, make sure you have done your research, and have your documentation and other proof (such as applicable statutes and/or policies) in place so you can make an informed case.**

If you are still not sure, please contact WPA so we can work with you and, if necessary, the other party to provide accurate information about Wisconsin’s homeschool law.

2019 Kohl Foundation Student Excellence Scholarship

From the Kohl Foundation website: “The purpose of the Herb Kohl Student Excellence Scholarship program is to recognize student leadership, citizenship, school and community involvement, and academic achievement. It is the goal of the Herb Kohl Educational Foundation to encourage Wisconsin youth to pursue post-secondary education in a public or nonpublic university, college, or vocational/technical college. The Foundation awards **\$10,000** scholarships to 100 Wisconsin high school graduates each year.”

Executive Director Jen Lynch, has been working closely with the Kohl Foundation over the last 12 months to make the homeschool applications for the Student Excellence Scholarship more relevant and applicable to homeschooling students. WPA has participated in these awards for over 18 years. The applications must be generally similar across educational choices and therefore Jen has also worked closely with the Department of Public Instruction and Wisconsin Council of Religious and Independent Schools.

Homeschool students receive a proportionate number of the total scholarships awarded each year.

The application process is now entirely online. This year’s application is now open at <http://kohleducation.org/>

Deadline for homeschool students is November 25, 2018.

2018 Conference Re-cap

Our 2018 Conference, *Authentic Homeschooling in the Information Age*, took place May 4 & 5, 2018 in Stevens Point. It was a marvelous weekend of community, information sharing, and good old fashioned fun! We had almost 600 people at the conference and received overwhelmingly positive feedback about the facilities and the workshops.

“I loved this year’s conference! I left feeling SO inspired and joyful. Thank you all for all of your hard work! The conference center was amazing, the hotel was great, and we all had a fantastic time. All the way home, my sons kept talking about how much fun they had! Thank you!! “

“Thank you so much! I have a better understanding of how to begin homeschooling for my family. It was encouraging to be around families with similar values as well. Thank you for all your time and effort. I’m looking forward to future conferences! “

“I loved the new venue—really great for a lot of reasons—easy to navigate, great for kid autonomy, nice to see everyone in one place, etc. The best conference we have attended!!! Thank you!!!”

“Thanks so much for making this happen. It’s a life changing event and my family gained lot. We know it was a lot of work!!!”

“I always adore the experience of the conference, and being with ‘my people.’ A lot of exhaling occurs. From the very first conference I attended, it has been invaluable to hear, from a parent with teens or adult children: ‘It’s going to be fine.’ Thank you!”

The conference is a valuable opportunity for homeschoolers in Wisconsin to come together, however there is no guarantee that the conference will continue.

The conference is a great deal of work and lots of volunteers are required in order for it to come together. So, if you are interested in making another conference happen please contact wpa@homeschooling-wpa.org.

A Word About the Future of WPA

At the Conference in May, Executive Director, Jen Lynch and President/Issues Director, Pamela Roland, announced their retirements at the end of 2019. The WPA Board has decided to transition to a working board, bringing the organization back to its original grassroots model. The transition began at the beginning of 2018 and will be complete at the end of this year as Jen and Pamela say goodbye.

The August 27th board meeting was a large and wonderful meeting full of people enthusiastic about doing the work needed to keep WPA running as an organization. As the rest of this newsletter indicates, CHANGE has been the big word in the homeschooling landscape in the last few years. WPA is committed to making UNITY the word of the future. We need people willing to do event planning, writing and editing, community outreach, and people willing to take a turn doing the nitty-gritty work of running a non-profit (accounting, website maintenance, membership). Please come to a board meeting to get involved (board meetings are always [posted](#) on the website). Wisconsin Parents Association is an organization of Wisconsin homeschooling families fighting for the freedom of all Wisconsin homeschooling families. When we maintain unity we work for the freedom of all.

Thank you so much for being members!

Will I Need Any of my Homeschool Records when I enter the workforce?

The short answer is: probably.

Similar to homeschoolers getting into college, homeschoolers entering the workforce may find they have a few extra hoops to jump through when seeking employment and demonstrating that they graduated from a home-based private educational program. Similar to getting into college, applying for a job as a homeschool graduate may take some additional advocacy on your part. As with entering college, you may find you will need to sell yourself and your experiences as a homeschooler. Your unique educational choices and experiences can be a real asset to a workforce filled with other employees who may have followed a more traditional path.

What home-based private education records might an employer require? Make sure you keep the following records in a safe place:

- Your diploma issued by the administrator of your home-based private educational program.
- Your PI-1206 forms covering your high school years. (Remember that this is your proof of enrollment in a home-based private educational program. The DPI only retains copies of the PI-1206 forms for seven years.)
- Your final high school transcript.

All of these records provide documentation that you have graduated from a home-based private educational program in the state of Wisconsin and that your diploma is legitimate.

To the administrator of a home-based educational program: As the administrator of your home-based private educational program, it is your responsibility to retain these records and any other records that you deem appropriate. Consider making sure each of your students has copies of these records as well.

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