



Policy Recommendations

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Introduction

Oversight of homeschooling varies widely from state to state and frequently lacks basic protections. While we understand that every state is different and that homeschooling policy can and will differ from state to state, we believe that all homeschool policies should:

- **Center on children’s interests**
- **Recognize homeschooling’s flexibility and potential for innovation**
- **Reflect what most responsible homeschooling parents already do**

Our recommendations are based on the above criteria, current best practices in several states, and conversations with current and former homeschool parents and homeschooled students. We have further research planned and will update these recommendations as needed. If you would like to offer your own feedback, [please contact us](#).

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Variety in Homeschool Options

In the current landscape of homeschooling policy, some states treat homeschooling as a unique legal category while other states treat homeschools as private schools. Still other states allow homeschools to operate as extensions of private schools that operate as “umbrella” schools. Finally, some states allow students to be educated at home in extension programs operated by public or charter schools. Many states offer some combination of these options. **We believe that all of these legal options for homeschooling are compatible with effective oversight of homeschooling and that each can coexist with effective protections for homeschooled students.** Enacting legal oversight need not require changing a state’s legal categorization of homeschooling.

The Homeschool Option

- In states with homeschool statutes, authority over homeschooling may effectively rest at either the local or state level.

Many states have dedicated homeschool statutes. Depending on the state, the local school district or the state department of education may have authority over homeschooling. With proper accountability measures, either state or local authority may be compatible with fair and effective oversight of homeschooling. Oversight at the local school district level currently exists in states such as [Ohio](#) and [Pennsylvania](#) while oversight at the state level exists in states such as [Louisiana](#) and [North Carolina](#).

The Individual Private School Option

- Allowing homeschools to function as individual private schools may be an effective option when combined with an appropriate level of oversight.

Some states allow homeschools to function as individual private schools. This legal structure may be compatible with supporting children’s interest in an education if the state creates oversight specific to the category of private schools composed of a single family in an individual home. [North Carolina](#)’s homeschool law, for example, consists of its private school law with a few amendments.

The Private “Umbrella” School Option

- Homeschooling through a private “umbrella” school may be an effective option when combined with an appropriate level of oversight.

Some states allow parents to enroll their children in existing private or church schools and educate them at home. These are often referred to as “umbrella” schools and, with appropriate oversight and requirements, may function in homeschooled students’ best interests and offer an attractive option for homeschool parents. [Maryland](#) and [Washington](#) currently have oversight in place for “umbrella” schools.

The Cyber Charter or Online Public School Option

- Cyber charters and online public schools may be an effective option when combined with appropriate accountability.

Some states allow students to be enrolled in cyber charters or public-school-at-home programs. Some cyber charters or public-school-at-home options may allow students to be educated at home for part of the week and attend a brick-and-mortar school for the rest of the week. With appropriate accountability and responsible management of public funds, these options can offer students a diverse and enriching educational option. Public schools in [Alaska](#) and [California](#), among other states, allow students to enroll in public school correspondence or independent study programs while being educated at home.

Public School Services

- Students should be allowed to participate in curricular and extracurricular activities, extension programs, and other opportunities provided by their local public schools.
- Public schools should have cooperative policies for awarding credit and assisting with the transition for homeschooled students who transfer in.

We believe in promoting healthy and cooperative relationships between homeschool families and their local public schools. We recommend allowing homeschooled students to enroll part-time in their local public schools and to participate in extracurriculars, including sports; expanding public school extension programs, which are sometimes called correspondence or independent study programs and often increase the resources available to both the schools and the students. Numerous states, such as [Alaska](#), [Florida](#), and [Iowa](#), currently provide homeschooled students access to both educational resources and public school curricular and extracurricular activities. We encourage public school administrators to draw on existing and future research on formerly homeschooled students' transition to public school, and to develop policies to help students successfully manage this change and create credit-awarding policies that take into account the flexible and varied nature of homeschooling.

Funding

- Public school districts should receive funds for services provided to homeschooled students.
- State funding should be made available to fund oversight of homeschooling.

We recommend that services provided to homeschooled students be taken into account when determining a public school district's funding allotment. We similarly recommend that oversight of homeschooling should be provided with the support of state education funding. While we understand that local school districts are often underfunded and juggling many priorities as it is, we believe that ensuring the education of homeschooled students is worth the investment, and that states should provide funding for public school districts to carry out their mandates.

Protections for At-Risk Children

- Parents who have committed offenses that would disqualify them from teaching school should not be permitted to homeschool.
- At-risk children should be flagged for additional protections and support.
- Students should be assessed annually by mandatory reporters.

We recommend barring from homeschooling parents convicted of child abuse, sexual offenses, or other crimes that would disqualify them from employment as a school teacher. This provision is currently in place in [Pennsylvania](#). We also recommend creating a process for flagging at-risk children, such as those in families with a troubling history of child protective services involvement, for intervention or additional monitoring. Finally, we recommend that the annual assessment requirement be conducted by mandatory reporters such as certified teachers; these individuals should be trained in how to recognize signs of abuse and how to report suspicions of maltreatment.

Notification

- Parents should be required to provide annual notification of homeschooling.

We recommend requiring parents to provide annual notification of their intent to homeschool. This notice should include at a minimum children's names, ages, and grade levels, as well as the names of the parents and the family's address. [Wisconsin](#) requires that this notice be filed with the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction while [Florida](#) requires it to be filed with the local superintendent; either is acceptable. We recommend that local school districts and state departments of education communicate to ensure that no homeschooled student goes unaccounted for. In the cases of umbrella schools, notification may be fulfilled through enrollment. Umbrella schools should be required to notify state or local officials of the enrolled homeschooled students, as is currently required in states such as [Maryland](#) and [South Carolina](#).

Parent Qualifications

- The parent providing primary instruction should have at least a high school diploma or GED.
- Parents who have committed offenses that would disqualify them from teaching other people's children should not be permitted to homeschool.

We recommend that the parent providing primary instruction be required to have at least a high school diploma or GED. In cases where a parent does not have this qualification, homeschooling may be permitted under the supervision of a certified teacher or other similarly qualified individual indefinitely or until a GED is obtained. States like [Ohio](#), [Washington](#), and [North Dakota](#) currently have similar parent qualification requirements. **We also recommend barring from homeschooling parents who have been convicted of child abuse, sexual offenses, or other crimes that would disqualify them from employment as a school teacher.** This provision is currently in place in [Pennsylvania](#).

Subjects

- Parents should be required to provide instruction in the same subjects as public schools.
- Parents should not be required to use the same textbooks or methods as public schools.
- Students should not be required to be at grade level in each subject; rather, student learning should show progress commensurate with their ability.

We recommend requiring parents to provide instruction (or facilitate learning) in the same range of subjects (e.g. English, math, science, history, etc.) taught in public schools in the state in which they live. This provision is currently in place in states such as [California](#) and [North Dakota](#). We recommend requiring this instruction to be sequential and commensurate with students' ability, as is required in states like [Wisconsin](#) and [Florida](#). Because homeschooling allows for positive flexibility and child-led learning, **we oppose requiring students to be at grade level in each subject.** We recommend clear requirements regarding what instruction must be provided (or what learning must be facilitated) at the high school level (e.g. biology, chemistry, algebra, etc.). We recognize that homeschoolers may take a nontraditional approach to fulfilling certain requirements, and therefore recommend that oversight be more concerned with learning taking place in each subject area than with how that learning is imparted.

Recordkeeping

- Parents should be required to maintain academic records for each child they homeschool.
- Parents should be required to submit copies of each child's birth certificate, immunization records, and annual assessment to be kept on file by either the local school district or state department of education or, when applicable, an umbrella school.

We recommend requiring parents to maintain a basic record of their students' academic progress, which may be used to demonstrate that learning is taking place should any questions arise. This requirement is currently in place in states such as [Missouri](#), [Maryland](#), and [Georgia](#). We recommend that a copy of each student's annual assessment, whether that be a standardized test or a portfolio review, be confidentially maintained and kept on file by either the local school district or the state department of education. This is currently required in [North Dakota](#). We recommend that local school districts or state departments of education require and keep on file information such as proof of age, proof of residency, and proof of immunization or exemption in the same way they would for any other student. [Arizona](#), [Louisiana](#), [Nebraska](#), and [North Dakota](#) currently have such documentation requirements. In states that allow for "umbrella" schools, these records may be maintained by the umbrella school. **Any and all of this information should be available to both the parents and the homeschooled student upon request.**

Assessment and Intervention

- Students' academic progress should be evaluated and reported annually.
- Parents should be allowed to choose between a number of different assessment mechanisms, including standardized tests and portfolio reviews.
- Failure to make adequate academic progress should result in intervention.

We recommend annual academic assessments that take into account the flexible and innovative nature of homeschooling. We recommend giving parents choice in the type of assessment by allowing them to choose between options such as standardized testing and portfolio reviews. Finally, we recommend intervention for students in need of specialized attention. [North Dakota](#), [Ohio](#), [Oregon](#), and [Pennsylvania](#), among other states, currently have assessment requirements and offer intervention.

Portfolio Review

- Portfolio reviews should be conducted by trained evaluators.

- Evaluators should meet with each student in person.

Portfolio reviews should be conducted by certified teachers or other education professionals who are neutral parties and meet with each child as a part of the reviewing process. **Portfolios should showcase student learning, and evaluators should be trained in requirements for adequate progress that focus on fostering and supporting student learning while reflecting the flexibility of homeschooling.** There should be a system of accountability for homeschooling families and evaluators in place to ensure that evaluators do their job fairly and effectively.

Standardized Tests

- Tests should be administered by qualified individuals.
- Students should meet minimum proficiency standards.

We recommend that standardized tests be administered by qualified individuals other than students' parents. Tests may be administered in the home or in a neutral setting such as a library. We recommend that public schools give students the option of being tested on-site at no cost. Adequate progress on standardized tests should be based on achieving minimum proficiency rather than on a percentile score.

Intervention

- Students who are not making adequate academic progress should have access to specialized attention.
- Should specialized attention fail to result in adequate academic progress, homeschooling should be discontinued.

We recommend that lack of adequate academic progress as indicated by test scores or portfolio evaluations result in intervention that provides students with specialized attention. **This intervention should be positive, cooperative, and child-centered** and should provide committed homeschool families with support and resources in an effort to help them succeed, but should also include consequences for failure to improve. Intervention processes currently exist in states such as [Ohio](#), [Oregon](#), [New York](#), and [North Dakota](#).

Umbrella Schools

- Umbrella schools should be required to assess students annually.
- Umbrella schools should be required to intervene in cases where adequate academic progress is not being made.

In states that include a private “umbrella” school option, umbrella schools should be required to conduct annual assessments of each student and provide intervention when adequate progress is not being made. This is currently required in [Washington](#).

Medical Care

- Homeschooled students should meet the same medical requirements as public schooled students in their state.
- Parents should file immunization records.

We recommend requiring that homeschooled students be required to meet the same requirements for regular physicals or other medical examinations as public schooled students in their state, and receive the same benefits. We recommend that homeschool families be required to comply with their state’s immunization standards, filing proof of immunizations or exemption along with their notice of intent or enrollment in an umbrella school.

Special Needs

- Public schools should make special needs testing and other special needs services available to homeschooled students.
- Each student with special needs should be required to have a privately-developed individualized education plan.
- Students with special needs should be assessed according to their abilities.

We recommend that public schools offer special needs testing for homeschooled students and make public school special needs services and resources available to homeschooled students when possible. The special needs testing process should be voluntary (except in the case that a student is not making adequate academic progress) and should include making available to parents information on what services and resources the school system has to offer the student. We recommend that the parents of special needs students be required to create an annual individualized education plan in cooperation with a service provider of their choice. This plan should include the method by which the student will be assessed at the end of the year, which should take into account the student’s abilities and include reasonable goals for student progress. This requirement is already in place in [Oregon](#).