

## **Open Letter to Support Group Leaders & the General Homeschool Community**

***From the Christian Homeschool Network (CHN), November 2007***

We are deeply grieved and troubled by reports from across the state regarding "school-at-home" programs offered by government schools. At the same time, we have been greatly pleased by the many organizations that are diligent to warn and protect local homeschoolers from the dangers of these programs. We are sorry if this letter seems unnecessarily lengthy, but we want to give you the information you will need to counter this attack on your family, organization and on all of our freedoms.

### ***Government School-At-Home Programs: A Serious Threat to Homeschool Freedoms in Washington & Across the Country***

CHN believes that government school-at-home programs are one of the greatest threats to homeschool freedoms in this country. These programs are operated by local public school districts and are known by such names as virtual schools, Alternative Learning Programs, Parent Partnership Programs, Homeschool Resource Centers, etc. These programs exploit homeschoolers and the homeschool movement, while using taxpayer monies to encourage enrollment.

These programs are an attempt by public educators to create publicly-funded homeschooling; the only future they lead to is government-controlled homeschooling. This is why Washington State homeschool organizations oppose these programs. While we do not believe that many legislators or the home educators using these programs intend this to be the outcome, it may easily become the **unintended consequence**.

Since 1984, the National Education Association (NEA) each year has passed a resolution stating that homeschooling should only be allowed if supervised by a state-certified teacher using a state-approved curriculum and state testing. CHN believes that government school-at-home programs are an attempt to bring homeschoolers back under the state umbrella to reach this goal. At this time, this is probably the single greatest threat to the homeschool movement. Government schools receive their funding based upon enrollment. "No students" equals "no money." "No money" equals "no program."

*The National Education Association believes that home schooling programs based on parental choice cannot provide the student with a comprehensive education experience. When home schooling occurs, students enrolled must meet all state curricular requirements, including the taking and passing of assessments to ensure adequate academic progress. Home schooling should be limited to the children of the immediate family, with all expenses being borne by the parents/guardians. Instruction should be by persons who are licensed by the appropriate state education licensure agency, and a curriculum approved by the state department of education should be used.*

**(NEA 2007-2008 Resolutions)**

Currently over one-third of the school districts in our state have government school-at-home programs. Many programs have been designated the point of contact for all homeschoolers in a school district. As such, they serve as the filing location for the DOI (*Declaration of Intent to Homeschool*) form, the place to arrange enrollment in Running Start, or a testing location. Several school districts even tell new homeschoolers that you must enroll in their program in order to homeschool.

## ***How Do These Programs Pose a Threat to Independent Homeschooling?***

Here's how: Parents who support these programs send a loud message that homeschoolers need help and do not mind more government control. CHN has talked to staff at several school district sites. The most common reason they gave for starting the program was that "homeschoolers need help." This statement, however, does not represent the mindset of the majority of homeschoolers; most homeschoolers strongly desire to remain independent of government school programs.

Here's a second way these programs pose a threat. They represent a more familiar style of education than traditional, independent homeschooling. As such, their procedures are more easily grasped by the non-homeschoolers, and therefore they threaten to become the standard by which homeschooling will be understood by school officials, the general public, and lawmakers. This runs counter to current research that shows homeschoolers are thriving regardless of government regulations or programs.

We do not mean to imply that there are no legitimate needs. However, there are several options available in the private sector to help meet these needs, such as support groups, homeschool cooperatives, private school extension programs, and private tutors. It is common knowledge that homeschool and private school students score higher on academic tests. How could anyone think that the government school-at-home programs could offer a higher quality program? Isn't the real issue that some would rather give up their freedom to completely direct the education of their children just to get free services from the government?

Our policy at CHN has been to support independent home education and we encourage ALL homeschool organizations to do the same. We want to encourage you to hold the line.

### ***Enrollment in Government School-at-Home Programs Is Enrollment in Public Schools!***

*Children enrolled in public school programs such as on-line programs, virtual schools, independent study programs, alternative learning programs, or parent partnership programs are considered full-time public school students and do not come under the home-based instruction law. Enrollment in these secular programs is enrollment in public school. This allows the public school to have authority over the student and to impose state assessments (WASL), district/state-approved curriculum, and supervision of the student-learning plan by a state employee or school district. CHN supports families whose education is primarily administered and controlled by parents privately.*

From the CHN website <http://www.chnow.org/id15.html> 2007

Do not underestimate the damage these programs can do to the local homeschool community and to your organization. We strongly encourage you as leaders to dedicate a day to fasting and prayer and continue to seek the Lord for wisdom and protection.

### ***What Our State Law Actually Says & How It is Being Abused***

As some of you may know, we have followed this issue since 1998. With the Lord's help we were able to stop legislation allowing for virtual schools in 1998 and 2004. However, in the 2005 session, there was a change of leadership in the Senate. Due to this and to support from a state homeschool organization (they agreed to support the bill as long as part-time attendance was allowed), we were not able to stop the passage of legislation allowing for virtual schools and, therefore, the expansion of government school-at-home programs.

However, CHN was able to do in Washington what no other state has been able to do—pass legislation requiring these programs to, at the time of enrollment, fully disclose to parents that the government-school-at-home programs are not recognized as “independent homeschooling.” CHN had hoped that parents would be at least informed that these programs are not homeschooling under the home-based instruction law.

The passage of the virtual school law created a rewrite of state rules, and now all government school-at-home programs (parent partnership programs, alternative learning programs, virtual schools, etc) are required, as described above, to give parents full disclosure, which must be signed by the parent and made available for audit. However, we believe that the majority of the programs are not complying with this clear requirement of the law. We have formally complained to Brian Sonntag, State Auditor, and his office is currently investigating some of the programs.

Secondly, we see many programs abusing the home-based instruction laws and actually telling parents that they can enroll for a certain amount of hours and still be considered homeschoolers under the home-based instruction law. **This is not correct.** While Washington State law allows homeschoolers to access the public school on a part-time basis, the parent still maintains authority and responsibility of the child’s education (under RCW 28A.150.350). However, with a government school-at-home program, the public school is authorized to “supervise” your child’s education. **This should not be confused with independent home education** (under RCW 28A.200 and 225.010):

WAC 392-121-182 Alternative learning experience requirements.

....*This section provides an alternative method of determining **full-time equivalent enrollment** and claiming state funding for public school learning experiences that are:*

*(b) Supervised, monitored, assessed, and evaluated by school staff.*

*(d) Provided in whole or part, outside the regular classroom setting...*

*(i) Responsibility for the parent(s) guardian to provide or implement a portion of the student’s alternative learning experience under the **supervision of school staff.***

The purpose of WAC 392-121-182 was to create guidelines for how a school district could claim full-time funding for students that were educated off-site.

The intent of the part-time attendance law was to allow homeschoolers access to the public school to take a class or two or play on a sports team, etc. It was **not** to allow homeschoolers to sign their children up at the local school for all of their classes except one and still be legally considered a homeschooler!

**The home-based instruction law applies only to parents/guardians who are teaching their child at home and assume full authority and responsibility of their child’s education. (RCW 28A.225.010).** It gives parents full authority and responsibility for their children’s education without government interference or oversight. A program supervised by the public school does not fall under the home-based instruction law.

Programs that tell parents they can enroll a student up to 90% of their hours and still retain their status as a homeschooler are abusing our law. In this scenario, this student would be considered a part-time public school student but certainly could not be considered a homeschool student. We have attended meetings in which school officials offered parents this exact scenario, and even some who required it. These officials are abusing our homeschool law to market their program and avoid state requirements and regulations, such as taking the WASL.

Some have asked, "Can I enroll for 50% of the hours or less?" The real question is who has authority and responsibility for the child's education? How do you determine 50% enrollment? The way these programs are structured, a child could take a couple of classes and since the program is "supervising" the child's education they can claim full funding, making that student a full-time public school student. How would a parent know if this was the case? Do you trust a public school official to look out for your best interest and rights? Based upon the many years we have followed this issue we would say "no." While many officials may be willing to "look the other way," this is inconsistent with Christian ethics. Public school officials do not have a vested interest in promoting or preserving home education or your freedoms. Many believe homeschoolers need their help and cannot deliver an adequate education without their intervention. We strongly disagree. The pioneers of the past proved it can be done.

Part-time enrollment is a little tricky with these programs. Yes, a home educator can enroll part-time and still be under the home-based instruction law: this has always been the case. However, at what point a student is considered part-time or full-time is unclear. In the past, government school-at-home programs required a child to be on-site from one to five hours and the school district was able to claim full funding for this student because they were "supervising" the child's education. The new rules now allow a program to claim full funding by merely developing a student learning plan and doing monthly assessments.

### ***How to Tell Which Is Which?***

How do you, as a home educator, know if the school district is telling you that your child is part-time while claiming him as a full-time public school student?" Here are some definite **red flags** that indicate this could be the case.

1. ***At enrollment did you fill out a written student learning plan?*** This includes curriculum to be used as well as co-op classes, parent-taught courses, and courses to be taken through the program.
2. ***Do you have to have weekly/monthly meetings or contact (perhaps via phone or e-mail)?***
3. ***Do you need to turn in a weekly time sheet?*** This is how the school district documents the twenty-five hours per week required for full funding.

These are all ways that the school claims to be supervising the child's education and give them a basis for claiming full funding. This is how a child taking one class—which we would consider to be part-time—can be claimed by the school district as full-time. The only way to know for sure if your child is considered as full-time or part-time is to request the school district's enrollment report and see for yourself.

**Please Note:** Filing a DOI form does not necessarily mean the state will view you as homeschooling under the home-based instruction law. A parent/guardian must meet the requirements of the home-based instruction law RCW 28A.200 and 225.010 in order to be considered a home educator.

**RCW Chapter 28A.200.020** *Home-based instruction --Certain decisions are the responsibility of parent unless otherwise specified. The state hereby recognizes that parents who are causing their children to receive home-based instruction under RCW 28A.225.010(4) shall be subject only to those minimum state laws and regulations which are necessary to insure that a sufficient basic educational opportunity is provided to the children*

receiving such instruction. **Therefore, all decisions relating to philosophy or doctrine, selection of books, teaching materials and curriculum, and methods, timing, and place in the provision or evaluation of home-based instruction shall be the responsibility of the parent** except for matters specifically referred to in this chapter.

**RCW 28A.225.010** 4) For the purposes of this chapter and chapter 28A.200RCW, instruction shall be home-based if it consists of planned and supervised instructional and related educational activities, including a curriculum and instruction in the basic skills of occupational education, science, mathematics, language, social studies, history, health, reading, writing, spelling, and the development of an appreciation of art and music, provided for a number of hours equivalent to the total annual program hours per grade level established for approved private schools under RCW 28A.195.010 and 28A.195.040 and if such activities are: **(a) Provided by a parent....**

**The term "homeschooling" first emerged in 1967 to describe the underground phenomenon of parents who chose not to send their children to public or traditional private schools.**

Many officials wrongly think that if the child is doing school at least partly at home, then it can be called homeschooling. Many times they misinform homeschoolers by telling them to file a DOI form, while at the same time enrolling and claiming the child as a full-time public school student. To them it is just "paperwork."

The State Auditor's Office (SAO) shared some of these concerns. In their report dated August 27, 2004, they made the following observation:

*Many districts operating parent-partner programs do not understand the difference between alternative learning experience (state-funded education) and home-based instruction in which the students are not in the public school system and receive no state funding. We found through discussions with district staff that some school districts refer to state laws that govern home-based education when discussing their parent-partnered programs.*

Since this report, state officials have communicated to school district staff the difference, which causes us to question why they continue to be confused.

FYI - At the beginning of the 2007 legislative session, we hand-delivered packets of information to each of the 147 legislators. We included this statement in our cover letter:

*The majority of home educators oppose these programs because they blur the line between homeschooling and public school. These public school programs often identify themselves as "homeschooling" but they are actually counterfeit programs and should not be confused with independent home education. Nor should anyone suppose them to have the same results. They are still experimental and are different from independent homeschooling. No research has been conducted to validate their results or success, nor can they yet claim to offer the proven track record of over 25 years of success that home education enjoys.*

Some of the programs we have researched ask who will be primarily working with the child. Those allowed to fill this role include the parent (guardian, step-parent), a relative (grandparent, aunt, uncle, sibling, etc.), a nanny, or some other person. Please do not confuse this with home education!

## **Conclusion: Take Action to Protect Your Family & Your Independent Homeschooling Freedoms!**

### **ACTION ITEMS:**

1. Make sure your organization's by-laws require that board members be home educating according to the home-based instruction law (RCW 28A.200 and 225.010), and are NOT enrolled in a government school-at-home program.
2. Do not allow members to pay for membership or other fees or for classes at cooperatives with dollars from government school-at-home programs.
3. Consider denying membership to those enrolled in a government school-at-home program since they do not fall under the legal definition of home education according to the home-based instruction law. They are under different laws and have different requirements. Remember that *"A little yeast works through the whole dough."*
4. Homeschool leaders should encourage parents to take responsibility, not to shrug responsibility or give up authority for their child's home education. Foster a support group that encourages and uplifts the parents but does not undermine their responsibility for their child's education. There is a big difference between helping someone and causing or allowing them to be dependent.

**Caution:** Some think that these government school-at-home programs are successful because they are meeting "unmet needs" of home educators. And, some for-profit co-ops have been formed to provide for these perceived needs. And some think these provide an alternative to government school-at-home programs. Our research, however, has shown that this has not been the case. Unfortunately, many families just join both. Instead, let's 1) stay the course by truly directing and guiding the education of our children, and 2) let's encourage all homeschoolers we know to do so, also.

5. Recognize that often these state-run programs will start out with few regulations or requirements, which is often in violation of state law or rule. Do not let this lead you to believe that this program is different. There are *always* strings attached to these programs, and in time they will surface.

At the 2007 **CHRISTIAN HERITAGE** Conference we interviewed the keynote speaker, Voddie Baucham. He made this comment regarding government school-at-home programs: "These programs are like a Trojan Horse: at first they appear as a gift but, as the Greeks found out, there was danger inside once it was opened." Home educators, beware if you are bringing this "gift" right in through the front door of your home!

6. Be aware that many of these programs will work with the school district to become the point of contact for all homeschoolers, as was detailed above. They may now serve as the filing location for the DOI form, enrollment in Running Start, and/or offer testing. The Home School Legal Defense Association recommends that home educators should obey the law and file their DOI form at the local superintendent's office, not at an alternate location. The best approach? Mail it to the superintendent's office instead of taking it in personally. (*Always use certified mail so you have proof it was received*). We should always obey the law; we needn't obey what an official directs us to do when it is not in alignment with the law.

7. Report any violations of local government school-at-home programs to the State Auditor's Office: Brian Sonntag P.O. Box 40031, Olympia, WA 98504-0031 or contact Louella Adams at

(360) 725-5606 or [adamsl@sao.wa.gov](mailto:adamsl@sao.wa.gov). Please send a carbon copy to CHN at [chnow@msn.com](mailto:chnow@msn.com) so that we can continue to monitor this situation.

8. Stay informed. Sign up your organization and board members for CHN's free legislative e-alert loop at [www.chnow.org](http://www.chnow.org). CHN has several articles on our web site that you can copy and put in your newsletter or copy and distribute to your group. Thank you to those of you who are doing this!

9. Stand for your freedoms. Come to the **Home Education Day at the Capitol** event held in Olympia: in 2008, Wednesday, February 6. Hear the special messages and visit with your lawmakers. (See [www.chnow.org](http://www.chnow.org) for details.) Make sure your legislators know the difference between independent home education and government school-at-home programs. If you cannot come, write them a letter and make sure you tell them your story and what home education has meant to your family. Most lawmakers just want reassurance that the law is working and the children are getting a good education.

10. Watch for articles in the media that confuse government school-at-home programs with independent home education. When this happens, be prepared to call or write to the publisher, inform them of the incorrect information, and ask them to print a correction. You can also write a letter to the editor.

11. **Most importantly, keep the vision alive for home-based discipleship.** Attend the state homeschool conference ([www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org](http://www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org))! And encourage members of your organization to attend, as well, to hear from speakers that God has raised up with a vision for multigenerational home-based discipleship for God's glory.

Let us boldly say that what we are dealing with here is not just an issue of law and what is or is not allowed, but the real issue is the heart. The fundamental question is, why do we homeschool our children? We think that maybe what we need to do is call it what it really is, and that is home discipleship—where education is only one of the many factors in the discipleship of the children God has entrusted to us.

During the several years we have been home discipling our children, we too have faced many struggles, but never once was enrolling them in a secular K-12 institution an acceptable alternative for us.

***It is like sending your arrows to the Philistines to have them sharpened.***

*Michael Bradrick - at the Christian Heritage Home Educators of WA picnic, 2007*

***Life will bring your children many struggles;  
remember that it will not be the academics that pull them through these times  
but their relationship and faith with our LORD Jesus Christ.***

*From CHN "Homeschooling for Today and Tomorrow" Workshop, 2007*

***Remember, we are preparing our children for eternity.***

*From CHN "Homeschooling for Today and Tomorrow" Workshop, 2007*

We at CHN want to encourage you to share a God-given vision to disciple our children for His glory. These programs will lose their appeal as you encourage families to bask in the blessings of our Lord. Make them thirsty for what He has to offer and they will reject Satan's counterfeit. Where there is conviction there is commitment and willingness to sacrifice. However, if home education is only just a preference, then we will continue to compromise and fall short of God's best.

In our first year of homeschooling we signed our son up for a science class at our local co-op. The teacher was not a Christian but was very popular among Christian homeschoolers and he respected their request to not teach any evolution. One evening DiAnna attended a meeting at a local support group to hear Dr. Brand, a Christian and a scientist, speak on why home educators should teach microbiology. Within five minutes of hearing this Godly man and his passion for teaching our children about science and the God of science, she was in tears. While our co-op's science teacher was a great teacher, he fell short of what should have really mattered and that was to sit at the feet of an awesome God and marvel at His wonders.

***Let us remind you that the government schools do not have a divine calling. They have no duty to God. They are not anointed to raise up children for our King. Why would we want to trust them with such an important task?***

*From CHN "Homeschooling for Today and Tomorrow" Workshop, 2007*

In addition to this letter, we have written several articles on this subject which have been published in the *Homeschool Digest* magazine. Here are links for your use:

[He is Sufficient](#) [This Is Our Ground](#) [Egypt Is No Longer My Home](#)

We have also prepared a toolkit with information for your use:

[Alternative Learning Programs Tool Kit](#)

And look for this article not yet online at [www.CHNow.org](http://www.CHNow.org) :

[Why Home Educators Should Encourage Reforms in Government School-at-Home Programs](#)

We hope that we have provided you with a helpful overview of the issues. Please feel free to contact us if you have more questions. Our prayers are with you. May the Lord give you wisdom and unity, and may His will be done.

***By His grace and for His glory,***

Scott & DiAnna Brannan

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*Scott and DiAnna Brannan have been married twenty-three years. They have two teenage children, whom are totally homeschooled. The Brannan's have served in several capacities within the homeschool community. They currently serve on the board of a homeschool cooperative, which they founded and currently teach classes. They are founders of the Christian Homeschool Network of Washington (CHN). CHN's mission is to communicate legislative and local issues that effect homeschooling in the state of Washington. CHN is legislative liaison to Christian Heritage Home Educators of Washington*  
[www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org](http://www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org)

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CHRISTIAN HERITAGE HOME EDUCATORS OF WASHINGTON ( [www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org](http://www.ChristianHeritageOnline.org) )

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