



VaHomeschoolers Survey of State Athletic Associations

July 30, 2012

In early summer of 2012, VaHomeschoolers conducted an informal survey of state high school athletic associations. We contacted (via email) the executive directors of 20 state high school athletic associations in states that have a statute requiring some level of access for homeschooled students to high school interscholastic programs:

Arizona	Maine	New Mexico	South Dakota
Colorado	Minnesota	North Dakota	Utah
Florida	Nebraska	Oregon	Vermont
Idaho	Nevada	Pennsylvania	Washington
Louisiana	New Hampshire	Rhode Island	Wyoming

Thirteen of these states (in bold) have statutes requiring full access for homeschooled students; the remaining seven have statutes that provide access that is limited in some way (linked to partial enrollment or allowing localities to set their own policies, for example).

Survey Questions

The purpose of our survey was to gather information on how homeschool sports access is working in these states, in order to contribute to the development of the best possible policies and eligibility rules for Virginia. We asked executive directors to provide brief feedback regarding how including homeschooled students has worked in their programs. Specifically, we asked:

1. Since implementing eligibility guidelines that allow homeschooled students to try out for and participate in high school athletics and other activities, what level of response have you seen from homeschoolers? (Have large numbers sought to participate? Relatively small numbers? Has participation been concentrated in specific communities, such as those without recreational leagues for teen players?)
2. What kind of feedback have you received regarding the implementation of this policy change?
3. If there have been difficulties or concerns, what were they? Have they been resolved? Are there remaining areas that you feel should be addressed?
4. Overall, what is your assessment of the impact on NHIAA of including homeschooled students?

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Survey Responses

We were pleased to receive responses to our questions from eight states: Idaho, Maine, Nebraska, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, and South Dakota. Two additional states (Wyoming and Colorado) declined to participate, and the remainder did not respond.

While the responses from this informal survey are not statistically significant, overall, we believe they do suggest the following conclusions relevant to policy development in Virginia:

- VaHomeschoolers' estimate that, in most school divisions, only a small number of Virginia's homeschooled students would try out for public school interscholastic programs appears to be well-founded. In states where homeschool sports access is in place already, in many cases, small numbers of homeschooled students are participating.
- Once homeschool access policies are in place, there is generally little negative feedback from the local community, school administrators and coaches.
- Where there are difficulties and or concerns with homeschool sports access, they often mirror problems associated with serving public school students. The same processes that prevent rules abuse by public school students should be enforced for homeschooled students.
- It is important to ensure that academic eligibility requirements for homeschooled students do not create an additional oversight burden for administrators and coaches. Tying them to the state home instruction requirements and existing reporting process may be of assistance in this area.
- Despite understandable concerns that creating eligibility guidelines for homeschooled students may result in significant impact on local school boards, principals, coaches and teams, many states that currently allow access are finding that over time, there is very little impact.

A summary of the survey responses follows.

Question 1: Participation Levels of Homeschooled Students

Idaho: Reported “relatively small numbers” of homeschooled students were participating in high school interscholastic sports and activities. These students were not concentrated in any particular communities within the state.

Maine: “We have not tracked exact numbers but anecdotally the numbers have been somewhat minimal.” MPA Executive Director Dick Durost said, “I don’t believe that there is a category of communities more likely to have homeschooled students participating. To some degree, homeschooled students are perhaps more likely to participate in individual sports such as golf, cross country, and tennis rather than team sports such as football, basketball and baseball/softball.”

Nebraska: “Although we do not keep ‘official’ records of the number of home school students that participate in high school activities, our general thought is that participation has been minimal in most schools in the state. We have received less than 10 calls from our member schools this year inquiring about the rules for home school students to participate, and while this may only be an indication of the fact that schools understand the rules and hence do not feel the need to call, it is our feeling that the number of home school students that participate has not been an issue of concern with our members. We do not see a concentration of home school student participation in any geographic or population area of our state, although the largest concentration of home school students is generally located in the highest populated areas of the state. The rise of club sports; volleyball, softball, soccer and swimming, to name a few, may be some of the reason that home school students do not choose to participate in high school activities in great numbers, but rather participate in these organizations.”

Nevada: “[T]he percentage [of participants who are homeschooled] is less than 1% and of this percentage, the lion’s share participate in the following sanctioned activities that have no maximum participant roster limitations: Golf, Tennis, Swimming and Diving, Cross Country/Track and Field.”

New Hampshire: “[V]ery few homeschoolers participated in interscholastic athletics.” R. Patrick Corbin, Executive Director of NHIAA, wrote that homeschooled students “were far more likely to participate in advanced technology courses, AP courses, and music programs like band and chorus. In 7 years as the director of the NHIAA this appears to be a universal trend across the state which has schools with as few as 20 students up to communities with 3,600 student schools. There are no trends or data to suggest they are more concentrated in certain localities more than others nor is there any evidence that recreational program availability impacts the numbers either.”

North Dakota: “We have a relatively large number of home-school students competing. I believe communities classified large and small have home-school students competing.”

Rhode Island: “We have not seen a large response,” based on data reported by most schools (schools are not required to report numbers of homeschooled students participating in RIIL programs).

South Dakota: Indicated that no data are collected on homeschooled student participation across the state, and that policies are created on the local level.

Question 2: Feedback from Schools, Coaches, and the Community

Idaho: Simply characterized the feedback they have received as “very positive.”

Maine: “Maine is a ‘local control’ state and most Mainers do not like for state government to interfere in local policy or to tell them what to do. There was negative pushback initially but that has lessened in the last 15 to 20 years. There is still concern locally when a student who is fully enrolled, walks the halls and attends classes every day, and “wears the school colors”, is replaced on a team or starting lineup by someone who attends only for practices and games. Many believe participation should be a reward for active involvement in the full school experience, not a right based on residency.”

Nebraska: “Generally speaking our schools are satisfied with our current policy of enrolling in at least 20 hours of credit (1/2 time) in order to participate in NSAA activities. Feedback from parents and some legislators would like to see this policy changed so that home school students would not have to attend or take any classes at the local high school in order to be a member of the high school activity program. At this time the general feeling of our membership would be that a home school student should have a connection to the NSAA school for which they are participating and the membership would not embrace a change to the current policy.”

Nevada: Did not respond specifically to this question.

New Hampshire: “[H]omeschoolers have had access to public school programs since the 1970s.” [Indicating, presumably, that the situation is a given by now].

North Dakota: “Some member schools embrace participation and others do not.”

Rhode Island: “This has not been a controversial issue. If the child is listed on the local school rolls and his/her program of study has been certified by the RI Dept of Ed they technically are deemed students of that school.”

South Dakota: “We really don’t hear anything even though our member schools advised the Association’s attorney to lobby against allowing home schooled students to participate for at least 7 years or more.”

Question 3: Difficulties and Concerns

Idaho: "State law requires homeschool students to participate in the school district/attendance zone in which they live. Some parents want their students to play outside their attendance zone. We just hang tough, not a problem for us but [some] parents don't like it."

Maine: "The biggest concern continues to be that of ensuring academic rigor and eligibility. MPA policies require that homeschooled students must meet all academic and citizenship requirements that are expected of fully enrolled students. Because principals must ensure that their student athletes meet MPA as well as local requirements, we maintain the position that parents must provide documentation requested by the principal including coursework, academic progress, citizenship contracts, age limits, etc. Failure to do so might place the team in jeopardy of forfeits and removal from championship play should a student's eligibility be successfully challenged."

Nebraska: "[H]aving a home school student participate in an NSAA activity without enrolling (at least minimally) at the school they represent, continues to be an issue. If we receive any calls from home school parents or legislators about this issue, it generally centers around the issue of "Why do I have to enroll at all in the school to participate in activities" and/or "I pay taxes in this school district, why can't I take part in the activities of the school without enrolling at the school?"

Nevada: Did not respond specifically to this question.

New Hampshire: "The difficulties that exist usually center around verification of eligibility with respect to academic status, i.e. are they taking the equivalent of a full load of classes, if getting credits from out of state agencies are they certified or are they storefront operations (Very commonly found in Florida), do their grades make them eligible (Rarely a concern for I have never seen a single homeschooler with anything but straight "A", etc.) And again there are so few it is not an issue."

North Dakota: "North Dakota State Law provides for home-schooled students to compete at their public school of residence or private school of choice. Parents seem to think home-school students should be able to compete for whatever school they choose and be able to transfer to different schools as they desire. This causes a problem for member schools and the Association."

Rhode Island: "Over the years there are very few concerns. This past year a home schooled tennis player chose to compete for his local school after competing for the US junior team. By our rules he was eligible, but many parents felt that this was unfair."

South Dakota: "None that I am aware of at this time. We did have one instance this year where a music student tried to 'bend the rules' in order to be able to participate in All-State Orchestra...we not have heard of any [continuing] concerns from our membership."

Question 4: Overall Impact Assessment

Idaho: “No impact at all.”

Maine: “The impact has not been on the MPA but rather on the local school and community... Opportunities for homeschooled students first became available in Maine around 1989. A state law was passed making it permissible for such participation but leaving it as a local option or decision. In the mid 90’s both state law and Maine Principals’ Association (MPA) policy were revised to require the opportunity to participate at the local public high school to which the student would otherwise attend based on the family residency. Homeschooled students are not guaranteed participation – only the same opportunity to try out for and be selected for the sport or activity – the same as any regularly enrolled student. There is no form of school choice around this issue.”

Nebraska: “My general feeling is that the impact of home school participation in high school activities in the state is minimal, at best. I have heard of no home school student who has won a state championship, or been part of a state championship team over the last 2 years. This may have occurred, but was not publicized. For the most part the accomplishments of home school students that have made the headlines in state-wide newspapers have been in the area of academic achievements, ACT, SAT, Academic All State Honors, etc.”

Nevada: Did not respond specifically to this question.

New Hampshire: “The impact to this organization and high school sports in New Hampshire has been negligible at best. Often homeschoolers start taking courses at local high schools and end up transferring in as full time students.”

North Dakota: “Overall, I believe it works well as long as parents don’t think they can school shop for the best programs.”

Rhode Island: “...this issue has not been a big concern. In our estimation having the opportunity to participate while living in the community is beneficial.”

South Dakota: “I would have to say [there has been] very little [impact] at this time. I say that because we as an Association really do not know how many home schooled students we have participating in our programs.”