

Homeschoolers and Virtual Charter Schools

Summary: Parents who enroll their children in a virtual charter school or other public school program are surrendering responsibility for their children's educations and agreeing to comply with government standards, use the government-selected curriculum, and have their children take state-mandated tests. They are also undermining the freedoms of other homeschoolers by opening the door for extending government regulation of virtual charter schools to homeschools.

Virtual charter schools are NOT homeschools. Homeschools are private schools in which parents take direct responsibility for their children's education, including choosing a curriculum and educational standards and deciding whether to test their children and, if so, what tests to use and what to do with the results. Virtual charter schools students are public school students who must comply with state standards in education, follow the curriculum chosen by the school, and take state-mandated tests. In other words, the government takes responsibility for the education of children enrolled in virtual charter schools; controls these schools; and dictates the knowledge, skills, and values their students are to acquire.

Virtual charter school students must be distinguished from homeschoolers. Otherwise, the regulations that virtual charter school students must comply with because they are public school students may be applied to homeschoolers.

Virtual charter schools threaten the freedoms of homeschoolers. Experiences outside Wisconsin show that when government regulation is increased for homeschoolers who accept tax dollars or participate in public school programs, the same regulations are often applied to all homeschoolers, including those who are not participating in the programs. It is a mistake to think that you can enroll in a virtual charter school and

then, if you decide you don't like being under government regulation, become a homeschooler. Virtual charter schools are blurring the distinction between public and private schools, especially when virtual charter schools claim they are "homeschools." If you do later decide you want to homeschool, you may well find that the government has applied some or all of the regulations that apply to virtual charter school students to homeschoolers as well and you no longer have the option of educating your own children without government regulation.

School districts hope to get more money by enrolling homeschoolers in virtual charter schools and other public school programs. When they increase their enrollment, they get more money from state and local taxpayers.

According to the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) and state statutes, **districts are allowed use of information from PI-1206 forms that homeschoolers submit to the DPI only for record keeping.** It is illegal for districts to use the information to contact homeschoolers.

Please join with homeschoolers and others who are working to ensure that parents can choose private schooling, including homeschooling, as a way of educating their children without government regulation.