

Getting Started Homeschooling

prepared by Jen Garrison Stuber, WHO Board Advocacy Chair

The first thing to understand is that compulsory attendance in WA is from ages 8-18. Children under the age of 8 are not required to attend school, including homeschool. Therefore, none of the HBI (home-based instruction, the legal name for homeschooling) laws apply to children under the age of 8. Those children remain educationally free.

Beginning on your child's 8th birthday, you must either enroll in a school, or homeschool. To homeschool, you must qualify, declare intent, begin to cover the 11 subjects, test or assess annually, and keep certain records. More on each of these here:

<http://www.washhomeschool.org/homeschooling/law.html>

Please note that ALEs, online schools, PPPs, etc., even those which take place in the home, are not homeschooling under WA law. Public school laws apply to those programs and are not covered in this document.

You only need meet *one* of the qualifications:

Either 45 college quarter credit hours (about 24-30 semester hours, or one year full time college work) in any subject;

OR take a Parent Qualifying Course;

OR hire a teacher to supervise;

OR gain superintendent approval.

We offer the Parent Qualifying Course at Convention www.washhomeschool.org/convention , and we keep a list of folks who offer it across the state on our website. Please plan to join us for Convention in any case – it's two days of workshops, seminars, family activities, hundreds of vendors, and lots of ideas and inspiration. Consider joining us on Facebook as well for up to day information, the Email of the Day, and homeschool encouragement.

The first Declaration of Intent should be submitted when your child turns 8. The second and subsequent will be filed on the 15th of September each year thereafter. The law requires only your child's name and age, as well as your name and address (so the district knows you've filed in the right place) on the DoFI. Many schools ask for more information than is required by law. You are not obliged to provide it. There is a DoFI that is in compliance with the law here:

<http://www.washhomeschool.org/homeschooling/Declaration.pdf>

It should be sent to the superintendent of your local school district (usually in the district office -- the address will be on the district's website). If you are unsure of which district you reside in, telephone the local school – they will be able to tell you, based on your address.

I used to send in two copies with an SASE; my district would stamp my copy and send it back for my files. This is not necessary, but it useful for showing places where you'd like to get an educator discount.

If your child is already in school, then you need to formally withdraw h**. The school usually has a form for this, but you could write a letter that says roughly this: I [Name of Parent] hereby formally withdraw [Name of Student(s)] from [Name of School], effective [Date of Withdraw]. Then sign it and date it. If your child is >8yo, you will need to file a Declaration of Intent that same day in the superintendent's office. If the child is <8yo, you wait until h** birthday to submit the Declaration of

Intent. Many school officials erroneously believe that if the child was in school before, even if *he is 5, 6, or 7, that you must file a Declaration of Intent. This is a common misconception that is contrary to the compulsory attendance law. You may withdraw a child from public school at any point in the school year.

You do not need to cover the 11 subjects every day, every week, or even every year. Some are meant for the lower grades (social studies); some are meant for the upper grades (history). In the public schools, occupational education is that one day that the police officer, firefighter, and doctor parents come in and share about their jobs. PE is not a required subject (though it might certainly fall under health, which is), nor is literature (which just makes me cringe).

You have a choice to test OR to assess annually. The test must be an academic achievement test given by a qualified individual. It is the testing companies that qualify individuals to proctor their tests. Some require a bachelor's degree, some an advanced degree in psychology plus specialized training in that test, and others simply require that you be a homeschooling parent in WA. The assessment must be performed by a certificated person currently working in the field of education.

The certain records you must keep are the test/assessment scores and immunization records. These are the records a school may request from you at the time of a transfer. If you have taken a medical, philosophical, or religious exemption, to vaccination, you should use that paperwork for this documentation.

How, when, where you homeschool – these are choices that are completely up to you. The law specifically states that “parents who are causing their children to receive home-based instruction shall be subject only to those minimum state laws and regulations which are necessary in ensuring 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.

The homeschool law also states that the legislature recognizes that home-based instruction is less structured and more experiential than the instruction normally provided in a classroom. Therefore, the provisions relating to the nature and quantity of instructional and related educational activities shall be liberally construed.”

You are free to choose any curriculum, or to choose none.

Find what works for you and yours, don't bother trying to “keep up with the Joneses,” and you'll see very quickly that your kids will excel in some areas, and not in others. It's okay. Play to their strengths, mitigate their weaknesses, help them develop a sense of wonder, a love of learning, and foster their innate curiosity. The rest will take care of itself.

When it all gets to be too much, consult your local homeschool group – they're the best source of information and support. <http://www.washhomeschool.org/homeschooling/support.html>

If you have more questions, give me a hollar at WHOCContact@washhomeschool.org

Warmly,

--Jen