

The Problem with Home-based Charter Schools

HSLDA's Position in the Charter School Debate

Charter schools are a new phenomenon rapidly gaining popularity across the country. All charter schools are created or "chartered" by public school boards, which establish a mission, educational program, and methods of assessment. Most charter schools are classroom based. However, some charter schools are home based. When parents enroll their child in a full-time, classroom-based charter school, it is obvious that they are signing away much of their parental right to direct their child's education. Home-based charter schools gloss over this surrender by giving parents a wide variety of "free" benefits, all for use at home: computer and Internet access, books, school supplies, support from certified teachers, and a diploma, etc.

Creates a little public school in your home

In reality, parents who accept government money through home-based charter schools are still signing over ultimate educational control of their children to the state. Enrolling in a home-based charter school creates a little public school in your home.

This is why HSLDA has for years opposed public school Independent Study Programs in California, and it's why we oppose home-based charter schools.

One of HSLDA's primary objectives is to establish the right of parents to independently teach their children at home free from government intervention. This is independent private home schooling. When HSLDA began in 1983, this was the only kind of home schooling that existed. In many states, home schooling was illegal. The same education establishment that fought home schooling years ago is beginning to see benefits of home-based charter schools. Is that because they are beginning to see the benefits of home schooling? The answer is a resounding "No!"

More profit for public schools

The issue is money and control. All public schools, including home-based charter schools, are funded based on attendance. The higher the student enrollment, the more money that is received. When a home schooler enrolls in a home-based charter school program, that school usually receives the same amount of funds for the student as if the child were attending the local public school. The difference is that the home-based charter school does not have to provide teachers, classrooms, and all the other related expenses of an on-site program.

Limits parental freedom & brings regulation

The state must hold recipients of taxpayer dollars accountable for how they use the funds. The flip side of the "free benefits" coin is not Lady Liberty—it's a door to increased "accountability checks": certified teacher oversight, curriculum approval, mandatory testing, and sometimes even home inspections. Ultimately, as these requirements grow, they will squelch one of the greatest benefits to home education—flexibility to accommodate each child's learning style and interest.

Rather than more control, HSLDA believes there should be less control and interference with parents' rights to direct the education of their children. Nationally normed standardized test results indicate that home schooled students score on average 30 percentile points above the national average. Private home schoolers have demonstrated that state funding and regulation are not necessary to achieve academic excellence.

Restricts religious freedom

Some 30 states already prohibit public schools and public school-funded programs from using sectarian materials. Because home-based charter schools are tax-funded, parents cannot use Christian or other religious curriculum, nor will the home-based charter school give their children credit for religious courses/materials.

The big picture—the effect of government money on private education

America's Founding Fathers wrote the Constitution to keep the state checked by the law in order to keep the private sphere truly free. When individuals accept state funds for private activities, the distinction between the state and the private sphere is blurred, self-government is weakened, and the state is further unleashed from the bounds of law to intrude upon the personal lives of its citizens. If the distinction between the state and the private sphere is damaged or falls, our whole constitutional system of government collapses.

Conclusion

HSLDA encourages every home schooling family to be informed—know your U.S. and state constitutional rights, read your state home schooling law, and consider carefully the implications of a decision to enroll in a home-based charter school.