

After School Special

By Reg P. Wydeven
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I loved playing high school football. On game days, we got to wear our jerseys to school. It made you feel pretty cool. But I always wondered, if you were homeschooled, would you wear your football jersey at home?

Well, homeschooled kids in Virginia may not find out.

Last month, the Virginia legislature voted down a bill that would allow homeschooled students to compete in public school sports or other interscholastic programs and extracurricular activities.

Thirty-one states currently allow homeschooled kids to participate in public school activities. Like Virginia, many of those states that do not allow it are considering kids to participate. The issue is most closely associated with college football legend Tim Tebow. Tebow was homeschooled in Florida but was still able to play sports at his local public high school. For this reason, this legislation is commonly called the “Tim Tebow Bill.”

In 2015, Wisconsin adopted its version of the Tim Tebow Bill. The law requires school boards to permit homeschooled pupils to participate in interscholastic athletics on the same basis and to the same extent as pupils enrolled in the district. However, the student must meet the school’s age, academic and disciplinary requirements. The school district may not question the accuracy or validity of the student’s assertions about these requirements.

Under the law, school boards can charge homeschooled students a fee to participate in activities for uniforms, equipment, musical instruments or for other costs, but only if they also charge enrolled students.

Even though it’s the law to allow homeschooled students to participate in public school activities, not everyone supports it.

Parents of kids in public schools and school officials believe that sports and other activities are a privilege for enrolled students to participate in. For sports with limited roster spots, they also don’t think it’s right that a homeschooled student could get a spot on a team while an enrolled student gets cut.

The Wisconsin Interscholastic Athletic Association also opposed the measure. Wade Labecki, the Deputy Director of the WIAA, told the Milwaukee Journal Sentinel that, “The reason for sports in schools is to keep kids in school . . . it’s the carrot they have to keep kids in school.” He believes if public school students see homeschooled students playing sports, they will be less motivated to continue their own education.

Surprisingly, parents of homeschooled students don’t like the law either. Again, according to the Journal Sentinel, they purportedly fear homeschooled students’ involvement in public school activities will result in increased governmental intrusion into their home schooling. Because homeschooled kids will have to meet the same requirements to participate as enrolled students, the public schools will get a glimpse into their curriculum and methods.

They cite a study by the Home School Legal Defense Association that revealed that only 3 to 5 percent of homeschooled students that are allowed to participate in public school athletics nationwide are actually interested in doing so.

We briefly considered homeschooling our children, but then remembered the worst part about homeschooling: no snow days.

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