



Christian Home Educators Association of California

Promote ▪ Provide ▪ Protect

Starting a Homeschool Group: Things You Should Know

Introduction

Let's be honest. The further away our culture drifts from Judeo-Christian values, the more government schools are becoming antagonistic to our faith. California public schools are now implementing the new sex education mandates which originated in the California Healthy Youth Act. The curriculum being implemented appears to have less to do with ensuring the health of California youths than it does the promotion of the values and agendas of powerful and vocal special interest groups.

It should not come as a surprise to pastors that families within their churches are looking for an alternative for their children's education. Day schools offer an excellent alternative to public school, but are not an option for many families due to financial reasons. Another and less expensive alternative is home education.

Churches can provide a great amount of support and encouragement for their families by starting a homeschool group with their communities. The type of group you choose to establish will depend on the needs of the families in your church and the type of support you are able to provide.

For specific information regarding exemptions from compulsory attendance laws, see CHEA's "Options in Homeschooling."

Type of Groups

There are three general types of private homeschool groups in California: Private School Satellite Programs (PSPs), support groups, and co-op classes. There is some overlap between them as PSPs and support groups offer many of the same social and educational activities. Families who participate in co-op classes can also be part of a PSP or support group. Sometimes the term "Consortium" has been used interchangeably with these terms.

For our purposes, the difference is this:

- A PSP files one affidavit on behalf of all its members. Each student enrolled is considered a private school student. As a private school, PSPs are required by law to maintain their students' cumulative records. Enrolled students are in compliance with compulsory attendance laws, so there is no need to file a Private School Affidavit.



- A support group does not file an affidavit on behalf of its members. Instead, each member's family chooses to file its own affidavit or to join a local PSP. The members are considered to be private school students but are not all enrolled in the same school.
- A Co-op is an organization formed for the purpose of regularly offering classes to homeschool students. Sometimes parents are enlisted to teach, but not necessarily. It can be a parent-led or a for-profit venture

Common services provided by PSPs are record keeping, curriculum counseling, parent/teacher training meetings, etc. In most cases, families are required to be accountable to the leaders or administrators of the PSP, at least by turning in certain records, or by having direct supervision of an administrator or hired teacher.

A strength of PSPs is that, because the PSP is a school with a reputation to maintain, there is typically a greater degree of accountability. This can motivate some parents to take homeschooling more seriously and teach their children more consistently. Also, since the private school affidavit is filed by one administrator, the enrolled families have more anonymity with government school officials.



Support groups usually do not provide record keeping services, though there may be experienced homeschoolers in the group who are willing to help individual families with their own records. Curriculum counseling and parent/teacher training seminars may be

available through the group, but there is usually no direct accountability to group leaders for records or actual teaching. A strength of support groups is that, because there is no direct accountability to an administrator outside the family, parents have more freedom to teach their children in accordance to their own values and direct leading from the Lord.

Church leaders have the opportunity to develop a unique community for faith formation by bringing parents, school administrators, and faith leaders together in partnerships for faith development.

Barna, 2019

Both types of groups usually strive to offer support to homeschoolers by offering fellowship, field trips, park days, special events (like promotion nights, science fairs, etc.), group classes, seminars, moms' nights out, and any other activities that members are interested in organizing.

As homeschooling continues to grow and attract new people with new ideas, other kinds of groups are becoming popular: co-op groups, offering classes one or two days per week; theme groups, involving families who all use similar teaching

materials or educational philosophy; age-segregated activity groups, providing social events for teens or for tots; and a variety of other specialized groups.

CHEA of California allows different kinds of groups to join our Support Network—as long as the groups meet our overall membership requirements.

There are many ways for a church to bring Christian homeschool families together and provide opportunities for support. We do not recommend one type of group over another, but trust that each church family can best determine what will meet their needs. CHEA does not administer or oversee individual groups. However, we consider it a privilege to help you get established.

Group Governance

Whichever type of group you have, be sure to take time at the very beginning to make clear decisions about how the group will be run. Will you have an elected governing board who makes decisions? Will church leadership be solely responsible? Will your group simply be accountable to church leadership? Or will it be autonomous? Will members vote on important decisions?

More groups have arguments, group splits, and bad feelings from disagreements over how the groups are

governed than any other problem. Misunderstandings develop, for example, when new people join, think they are voting members, then find that group decisions are made by a single leader or by a board that is not elected.

There are successful groups in which every member votes on most decisions and there are successful groups in which all decisions are made by a single leader. The most important issue is that those who join your group must know from the outset how decisions are made and who has the authority to make them.

When churches and day schools establish homeschool groups, CHEA recommends that someone who is well-versed in homeschooling be involved in overseeing your program. Someone who has firsthand experience would be preferable. Homeschooling is more than duplicating a classroom at home. It very quickly becomes a lifestyle.

Governing Documents

Writing down the decisions made about how your group is run is not an easy task, but it is a vital one. Having a written document which explains basic policies means there will be no arguments about what the policy is. You may have many discussions during the upcoming years about whether or not to change your policies, but at least everyone will have the same starting point.

There are four basic governing documents your group needs. These are usually best kept as simple as possible; lengthy constitutions can cause your group to become a bureaucracy with so many channels to go through that nothing can be accomplished.

1. Statement of Faith

When adopting a statement of faith for your group, you will need to determine how broad you want your membership base. A statement of faith that is very detailed may narrow your group's appeal to just one denomination, which is fine if that is your purpose. But if you hope to have a non-denominational group with members from a variety of churches in your area, you will need to keep your statement of faith basic enough to include those who have different doctrinal beliefs.

Some groups require all members to be in agreement with the statement of faith; others require only leaders to be in agreement, thereby allowing non-Christians to join, but not to serve as leaders.

2. Mission Statement or Statement of Purpose

This should be only one or two sentences and should tell the purpose and focus of your group. A mission statement does not give details about how the purpose is to be met—that is part of the by-laws and policies. The

beauty of a mission statement is that as you are faced with various decisions during your term of leadership, you will be able to use your mission statement as a guide by asking, "Will the activity or other decision I am considering further our mission?"

3. By-Laws, Constitution, or Operating Structure

This does not have to be lengthy, but should cover the general governing rules: who is the leader/s, how does a person become a leader, how are decisions made, and who can join the group? Some groups choose leaders through an election in which every member votes; other groups have a self-perpetuating board, meaning that the leaders invite someone to become a part of the leadership board. Some groups use a hybrid formula: those on the board choose new leaders, but a confirmation vote is taken from the membership.

By-laws also cover the length of the leader's term in office. Since it typically takes a year for a full transition of leaders, most groups have found that one-year terms are too short. Two to three years is probably the minimum a leader should serve, especially in a large and active group. Of course, many groups allow leaders to remain in their position indefinitely.



4. Policies

These are rules that govern particular situations or events: for example, membership criteria, code of conduct, conflict resolution, health and safety, release of liability waivers, medical release, dress code, refunds, late fees, publishing guidelines, parent supervision, and more. Publishing a handbook and/or putting these policies on your website are effective ways of making sure your members have access to this important information.

Business Structure

Will your group be a ministry of your church or will it be a separate entity? If you determine that it needs to be a separate entity, you will need to determine if it will be a corporation; a non-profit 501(c)(3) organization; or an informal, but not-for-profit community association.

Group Finances

It is inevitable that running a homeschool group incurs expenses. Will there be a membership fee? If you establish a PSP, will there be a monthly “tuition” to cover the additional cost of operation? Will that be per family or per student?

Will all finances be run through the church’s accounting department or will the homeschool group be required to have its own bank account? Will the group leader need to submit invoices? Will leadership have check signing privileges? These are all things to consider in the process of establishing your group.

Staffing

Depending on the number of families in your group, you will need to consider putting staff in place. You can determine whether staff will be all volunteers or whether you have resources to pay staff. Or perhaps you can dedicate existing church staff to take care of some of the responsibilities. Either way, CHEA recommends that you tailor your membership requirements to the amount of help you have available. If you require a high level of record-keeping accountability, you will need to have enough staff to follow through, or limit the number of families who participate.



Insurance

CHEA highly recommends that you carry insurance for your group. You should determine whether it is covered under your church’s policy or requires a separate policy. The type of insurance needed will be determined by the business structure and whether or not your group is covered by the church policy, as well as the number of members and number and size of events that you host.

Pastors Make the Difference

The post-Christian culture we live in is seeking to turn our children’s hearts and minds away from biblical values. It would undermine the church and the family’s efforts

to disciple their children all the while training them in its godless values. The new curriculums being implemented in schools are instrumental in teaching sinful, destructive behaviors and would undermine parental rights.

We are reminded of the words of the prophet Isaiah who said, “Woe to those who call evil good, and good evil; Who put darkness for light, and light for darkness; Who put bitter for sweet, and sweet for bitter! Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, And prudent in their own sight!” Is that not what is happening in state-run schools today?

We at CHEA are convinced that pastors hold a key position in this battle for the hearts and minds of the next generation. It’s time to acknowledge that California public schools are no longer suitable places to educate Christian children. Churches can provide the structure and security families need to take their children out of public schools and homeschool successfully.

With your help, parents in your church body need not send their young ones daily into an environment that seeks to undermine their faith. The anti-Christian environment in public schools did not come about overnight and we can’t expect it to be fixed overnight. We are concerned that we are in danger of losing a whole generation of Christian children. Please consider taking action on behalf of the families in your congregation.

For assistance or more information please contact us at CHEAinfo@cheaofca.org or 562-864-2432.

CHEA of California is dedicated to providing information, training, and support to parents desiring to give their children a Christian education at home.

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