



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on February 20, 2012

Virginia's "Tebow Law" Would Give Home Schoolers Access to Public School Athletics

While studies have demonstrated that [home schooling offers many academic advantages](#) over public and private schools, one drawback has been that homeschooled kids are often locked out of involvement in organized varsity sports. The Virginia law, like the one implemented in Florida and several other states, is intended to address that issue.

John Whitehead of the [Rutherford Institute](#) said that the bill would bring equality to homeschooled students who have the same desires and goals as traditional students, but whose families choose to educate them at home. "The chance to compete with one's peers, to fully develop one's potential, and to perhaps earn a scholarship to attend an institution of higher learning that might otherwise not be within a family's reach should be available to all Virginia students, including homeschooled students," Whitehead said of the legislation. "H.B. 947 is a long-overdue and much-needed acknowledgment by the Commonwealth of Virginia that homeschooled students are an equal and valued part of our communities and should be allowed to share their talents with their respective communities."



Opponents of the bill, including the Virginia High School League, argue that the measure could endanger the entire structure of high school athletics in the state. In a statement the League quoted former state superintendent for public instruction William Boshier, who warned that because "homeschool students can follow most any curriculum they want, it is possible that many excellent athletes will suddenly become home schooled and move into other school zones where they want to play. This would, in essence, create a free agency system that might even lead to recruiting at the high school level."

In reality, what Boshier describes is similar to the open-enrollment rules that already guide some states, allowing students to enroll in any school district they wish — which has led to some schools recruiting talented athletes and producing powerhouse teams in certain sports.

Virginia Delegate Rob Bell, who introduced the bill, pointed out that in Virginia there are some non-



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homeschooled students who never set foot inside a public school classroom, but who still play sports for public schools because they are involved in alternative forms of education. "There are students who take classes at local colleges, and even online classes, that never attend their high school, but they get to play high school sports," Bell told [World Net Daily](#) (WND). Only homeschooled students are barred from participation, he said.

Among other safeguards, the bill would require homeschooled students to demonstrate academic excellence for two years before they are allowed to try out for public school sports. Bell noted that there are currently some 32,000 homeschooled students in Virginia, 6,000 of them in high school. "This bill gives them a chance to play sports where they might not otherwise be able to," he told WND.

Of the bill's namesake, Bell told [CBN News](#) that Tim Tebow's example "shows how this can work. You can do this successfully; it doesn't tear down other athletics, it doesn't impede other students from being successful."

In its opposition to the bill, the Virginia High School League suggested that homeschooled students do not meet the academic standards supposedly required by public schools. But in a [letter to the state legislature](#) Whitehead countered that "the idea that homeschooled students might fail to meet minimal academic standards is belied by studies showing that home schoolers tend to outperform public school students on standardized tests."

He added that opponents of the bill conveniently forget "that people out there who have home schooled children are paying for the public schools as well. So it's a taxpayer issue to me [as well as] an equal rights issue."

William Estrada, an attorney with the [Home School Legal Defense Association](#), agreed. "Home schoolers pay all of their school taxes," he wrote in a [New York Times op-ed](#). "They don't use any public school resources. It's hard to see how a state law like the one proposed in Virginia is going to hurt anyone. Laws like this one have worked very well for years in 18 states."

Robert Ferraro, founder of the National High School Coaches Association, argued that approval of the measure was a "no-brainer. Education should be all about providing opportunities for all children. Of course, home-schooled children should be allowed to participate in the local public school's extracurricular activities."

Estrada noted that the opportunity afforded by school athletics has given thousands of homeschooled students around the country an open-door to success, among them Tim Tebow. "Because of this legislation, Tim Tebow was prepared for future victories as quarterback for the Florida Gators, and now as the Denver Bronco's starting quarterback," he wrote, adding that "competition is the key. It makes all students work harder, and it leads to better results. And that benefits all of us, not just coaches and players."

The Tim Tebow bill is now under consideration by the Virginia state Senate, and although opponents have put up a fierce fight, the measure has a good chance of passing and being signed into law by [Governor Bob McDonnell](#), who supports it.



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