



HOMESCHOOL MINNESOTA MÂCHÉ

MINNESOTA ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN HOME EDUCATORS

Testimony for the Minnesota House Education Policy DE Amendment/Omnibus Bill

From: Julie Johnson and Dr. Seann M. Dikkers, Executive Director

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We are writing on behalf of the Minnesota Association of Christian Homeschool Educators in opposition to a new state reporting mandate included in the Omnibus Bill (line 9.4-9.7). Specifically, we are concerned with the additional requirement of “proof” of prior testing plan, and “a copy of the official test scores.”

This reporting requirement is contrary to the 2011 Homeschool Mandate Reduction Bill which paved the way to simpler reporting requirements for Minnesota homeschoolers. At that time, the school districts also concluded that they did not want to receive and maintain unnecessary paperwork from homeschoolers - nor do homeschoolers need or want the additional paperwork. As these students are not attending the state-run school system, superintendents are not responsible for their academic growth or outcomes, nor are they required to report on performance of students that have been removed from state-run schools. We are not clear why this onerous new requirement is being reintroduced at this point. There is no credible evidence to suggest that a change in homeschool standardized testing reporting requirements is necessary or useful. This addition does not solve a current problem, or address documented concerns shared by the public.

This change does imply that those test scores actually represent learning. Standardized testing is the central instrument of a particular philosophy of education that isn't necessarily agreed on or proven itself in the data since the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act. The testing advocates seek uniformity, norm-referencing, and believe that subject areas can be measured and validated by the assessment tools they have created. They are measuring weight with an odometer. The only real beneficiaries of norm-referenced testing are to those that want to quantify the learning process to feel better about their oversight. There is no measurable benefit to children, families, or local schools. They assume that it implies growth in other non-testable areas of growth. They ignore the damaging effects of ranking, teaching to the test, funding, and the messages we send to children about what is really important, (see ASCD “Why Standardized Tests Don't Measure Educational Quality by W. James Popham for a clear overview” 56:6).

After 20 years, we see the same concerns noted above have persisted. We also see new emergent issues with testing fixation including increased stress on students, decreased instructional time for other subjects (in addition to lost time taking the actual tests!), a focus on weak areas instead of amplification of strengths, reintroduction of segregated students, less time for higher order thinking activities, increased

depression and socio-emotional issues, and no significant impact on learning even in areas chosen by the test makers.

In short, we still question the usefulness of standardized norm-referenced testing at a philosophical level.

Part of the reason that families make the sacrifice to homeschool is because they do not necessarily believe standardized tests have a positive impact on growth and learning. Many take them because they are bound to, but choose to ignore the “direction” and philosophy they have embedded into them. If the parents have access to data they can make the choice of how to, or whether to, apply them.

By submitting these scores, it implies oversight. We question why the state needs that data? Who is asking for this additional reporting requirement? What is their rationale? What are they planning to do with it? Oversight is only needed if action is to be taken based (or by implication that that action has legal grounds) on that oversight. We do not accept that children belong to the state in any way, they belong to parents first and by God-given authority.

Parents, as the stewards of their private homeschooled children have an obligation to protect child data and must advocate to protect educational data from those that have no need or reason to see that data. Learning data is assumed to be for the purpose of adjusting and monitoring growth. If that is the case, only those overseeing that educational process need to see that data.

This would be a significant step backward for homeschooling freedom in Minnesota. It would impose unnecessary and burdensome requirements on Minnesota homeschoolers and districts. And, it could provide government officials or other agents with the unconstitutional authority to see private data. Parents should be the ones who decide how their children are educated.

We encourage you to remove the addition of new state reporting requirements from the Education Policy Omnibus Bill.