

# Q & A

ASK US!

## Understanding Your Options for Part-Time Enrollment

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While some homeschoolers are opposed to any type of participation in public school services or resources, others may wish to avail themselves of the public school opportunities that may be open to them. This article is solely focused on part-time enrollment in the public school system; there may be other services available in your school district that are not discussed here.

**Q**uestion | Is my homeschooled child allowed to take academic classes on a part-time basis in Virginia public schools? At what age? What about extracurricular activities? Does this include classes at the community college?

**A**nswer | According to the Virginia Department of Education (VDOE) *Guidelines for Home Instruction in Virginia* ([doe.virginia.gov/families/private\\_home/home\\_instruction/home-instruction-handbook.pdf](http://doe.virginia.gov/families/private_home/home_instruction/home-instruction-handbook.pdf)), the Code of Virginia allows school boards to permit part-time attendance of children who are homeschooling under the home instruction statute (§22.1–254.1).

Please note that the law does not require your school division to allow part-time enrollment. However, VaHomeschoolers crafted and supported a law in 1997 (§22.1–253.13:2.N) that offers schools a financial incentive to open their doors to homeschoolers. Some school boards have chosen to develop part-time enrollment policies; others have chosen to specifically prohibit it. If your school division does not have an official policy, it may be the decision of the superintendent or even the school principal.

Please note that part-time enrollment is different from dual enrollment. Dual-enrolled students are generally high school students who are concurrently enrolled in college or university classes. Enrollment in the college or university classes is determined by the specific institution and is not covered by the homeschooling statute.

Children who are being taught at home under the Approved Tutor Provision (§22.1–254) or who have received a religious exemption (§22.1–254.B.1) from the compulsory education statute are *not* eligible to enroll in public school on a part-time basis.

### What are the advantages of part-time enrollment?

Part-time enrollment can be an economical way for a student to access equipment and resources that a homeschooling parent may find difficult or prohibitively expensive to attain (e.g.,

lab equipment or chemicals or foreign language teachers). Some parents may also feel that they are incapable of satisfactorily teaching a particular subject, while others may just enjoy not having to plan a particular class.

For college-bound high schoolers, part-time enrollment provides access to a broader selection of licensed teachers who may write recommendation letters. Grades from these classes are also considered to be more objective and can serve as a validation of the “mommy grades” on their transcript.

My teens also enjoyed the social aspect. Because their homeschooling friends held such diverse interests which drew them into separate classes and activities, they were feeling a bit isolated from peers. They enjoyed being able to interact with similar-aged peers for a short time each week, but they weren’t at the school long enough to feel

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## School Divisions That Allow Part-Time Enrollment

In the most recent School Division Review Project (completed in September 2017), VaHomeschoolers found that the following school districts allow some form of part-time enrollment to homeschoolers. Be sure to contact your school division for the most up-to-date information regarding your student's eligibility and the registration process.

### All Grades

Bath County  
Bedford County  
Bland County  
Brunswick County  
Buchanan County  
Buena Vista  
Charles City  
Charlottesville City  
Clarke County  
Craig County  
Dickenson County  
Giles County  
Goochland County  
Greene County  
King George County  
Madison County  
Manassas Park  
Manassas City  
Middlesex County  
Norton  
Orange County  
Page County  
Petersburg  
Pittsylvania County  
Pulaski County  
Rappahannock County  
Roanoke City  
Rockbridge County  
Scott County  
Stafford County  
Tazewell County  
Warren County  
Washington County  
Westmoreland County  
Winchester  
Wise County  
Wythe County

### Middle and High School Students

Albemarle County  
Alleghany County  
Amelia County  
Amherst County  
Chesterfield County  
Culpeper County  
Fairfax County  
Prince William County  
Staunton  
Waynesboro

### High School Students Only

Arlington County  
Fauquier County  
Frederick County  
Loudoun County  
Nelson County  
Rockingham County  
Spotsylvania County

### Unspecified Grade Levels

Falls Church  
Floyd County  
Fluvanna County  
Halifax County  
Hampton City  
Highland County  
Hopewell County  
Isle of Wight County  
Lexington  
Louisa County  
Powhatan County  
Salem

as if it were a burden. They also enjoyed having the choice to participate in some of the traditional high school events: pep rallies, dances, and spirit days.

### What are the disadvantages of part-time enrollment?

The biggest disadvantage to us was the block schedule. Block scheduling meant that my teens' classes were not held on the same days from week to week, making it nearly impossible to sign up for classes or co-ops for homeschoolers. Similarly, once the kids re-entered the public school system, our vacations and holidays were tied to the public school calendar. No more vacations during off-peak times. Rats!

For some parents, the social influences could be considered a disadvantage. As your kid's social groups become more mainstream, you often have less control over the influences on your child (if that is a concern for you). You may also have less insight into your child's school work and day. You and/or your child may feel the pressures of social media issues more intensely.

Some schools are very limiting on the kinds of activities your home-schooled student can attend. We were fortunate; my children's high school allowed them the options to be in the yearbook, attend prom, and walk for graduation (if they desired). I believe the only activities they were not allowed to participate in were extracurricular clubs and sports; but that is a county restriction, not particular to that high school.

One disadvantage of not being there the whole day, though, was that they often missed announcements for schedule changes during the school day. If a pep rally shortened a class period, for example, we would often not know about it ahead of time. Fortunately, most of their teachers were very accommodating once they learned of the kids' part-time status and ensured they learned about major changes to the bell schedule (e.g., due to school-wide testing).

Speaking of testing, that's also a disadvantage. If your student is signed

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up for a class that requires passing the Virginia SOLs (Standards of Learning) for that class, your homeschooled student must also pass the SOL to obtain credit.

### **How do I determine if my school division allows part-time enrollment?**

Some school divisions helpfully detail their policies about part-time enrollment with the information about where and how homeschoolers should submit their annual paperwork. For other divisions, you may have to dig around to find the information in their policy manual. Occasionally, school divisions do not have formal written homeschooling policies. For these divisions, you may need to contact the home instruction office or superintendent for information. A good place to start is the contact that you use to submit your annual paperwork.

The most recent VaHomeschoolers School Division Policy Review<sup>1</sup>, which took place in August 2017, found that 66 of the 132 school divisions permit homeschooled students to take classes on a part-time basis. See the sidebar for a listing of these divisions.

### **What are the restrictions?**

Restrictions vary across the Commonwealth. Some school divisions restrict part-time enrollment to specific age groups; others grant participation to all ages. Some restrict enrollment to particular academic classes; some have limits on the number of classes for which your student can register. Some allow enrollment in extracurricular activities; some specify requirements for participation in these activities. Since it is up to each school division to set their own policies, it is best to contact the school division directly to learn their regulations.

Participation in interscholastic activities (such as varsity sports and debate competitions) is governed by the policies of the Virginia High School League (VHSL) and is not determined by the school division. In the 2018 session of the General Assembly, the sports

<sup>1</sup> *VaHomeschoolers Voice*, Volume 23, No 5, November–December 2017.

access bill also known as the “Tebow Bill” was once again presented by Delegate Rob Bell. Last year, the bill passed both the Virginia House and Senate, but was vetoed by then-Governor Terry McAuliffe. The bill failed to pass again this year.

### **How do I register?**

School divisions that allow part-time enrollment also set their own rules for registration; it would behoove you to look for the information well before you need it. In Fairfax County, for example, applications for part-time enrollment are due between April 15 and June 1. The application is not complete without the submission of your evidence of progress for the current school year, so you will have to complete any standardized testing or evaluations much earlier than the home instruction statute specifies.

If part-time enrollment is something you are considering for your student, this is a great time of year to begin your research for the 2018–2019 school year.

*Erin Scherger’s children took advantage of part-time enrollment at their local high school to fulfill their foreign language and lab science requirements. While they appreciated the experience, they were not fond of the school lunch. Erin will be speaking further about part-time enrollment and other high school-related topics during the VaHomeschoolers Conference and Resource Fair in March.*

## **Contact VaHomeschoolers for More Help**

Homeschoolers in Virginia with questions about part-time enrollment, or any other aspect of homeschooling, are invited to contact VaHomeschoolers through our Helpline or Helpdesk. Our veteran homeschoolers volunteer their time to provide free assistance and advice.

Reach the Helpdesk by emailing [Info@VaHomeschoolers.org](mailto:Info@VaHomeschoolers.org). If you prefer to speak over the phone, our Helpline can be reached, toll-free, at 866-513-6173.