

Conversations with Legislators - Tips for Parents at Capitol Day

G.R.A.C.E.

Gracious - Smile warmly. Be hospitable. Introduce yourself with a handshake and good eye contact.

Real - Be honest and genuine. Acknowledge if you don't know something or direct them to someone who may.

Attentive - Listen carefully. Wait your turn to speak. Use open posture.

Check - If you are not sure that you understand a question, reflect back what you are hearing to clarify. ("It sounds like you may be concerned about X - is that correct?")

Enlighten - You are an ambassador for homeschooling; illuminate the many benefits you enjoy as a family and enlarge their view in a positive way. Avoid comparing it to public school or disparaging other forms of education. Most legislators are aware of the state of public schools and can draw their own conclusions.

Conversation Starters:

To make easy conversation, ask open ended questions and allow the answers to guide the conversation. People naturally like to talk about themselves:

Why did you choose to run for office? What issues are most important to you?

What do you know (or have you heard) about homeschooling?

Is there anything you are curious about with regard to homeschooling?

What do you think about the rights of parents to make decisions regarding their child's health, education or welfare vs the rights and interests of others in their lives?

What are the biggest surprises, challenges or rewards you have faced as a legislator?

Questions You Should be Prepared to Answer:

CT statute 10-184 (Duties of Parents)

Be clear on what it says, particularly the first sentence, and how it provides for your right to teach our children at home. The statute states that parents have the primary responsibility for their child's education. *Only* if they do not fulfill their duty are they required to send them to school. This has been the law in CT since 1650. Contemporary public schools are actually the "new" thing in education, homeschooling was normal until about 150 years ago

What about sports?

[High school sports leagues in CT are governed by the CIAC and homeschoolers are not allowed to participate. TEACH does not support changing this via legislative means. Please see us if you need more details.]

What about socialization?

You know the drill...

I'm a big supporter of school choice - including homeschooling!

[School choice involves the ability to enroll in different educational options using government funds. Private, parent-direct home education does not receive any government funds and is therefore not considered part of "school choice". Government funding of private homeschooling, where it has been implemented, leads to reduced freedom to the detriment of homeschooling, every time. Most of us prefer freedom to money.]

How do you teach advanced subjects with which you are not familiar?

[Homeschool textbooks are designed for self-paced study. Tutoring, online classes, community college and co-op arrangements with other parents are numerous. Parents are motivated to make sure their children succeed.]

I think most homeschooling parents do a great job, but what about the ones who don't? Shouldn't there be a little oversight to make sure they are providing a proper education?

This is trickier. First find your common ground:

- **We all want what is best** for our children, and nobody cares as much about protecting children as their own parents.
- **There are already laws on the books** for parents who abuse or neglect their children. Laws can be enforced to punish law breakers, but there are no laws that can prevent the commission of crimes
- **Homeschooling parents are concerned about the well-being of all children.** But there is no evidence that shows that regular DCF oversight and public schools are the most effective way to help children who are in need.
- **Regulation requires money and resources** to enforce and has not been shown effective in helping those children who need it. **No legislation should be passed until we find solutions that work.**
- There has been shown **no connection** between the amount of homeschool regulation and the academic achievement or safety of children. (We can provide studies that back this up - legislators want to pursue legislation that leads to measurable, positive outcomes)

If you get asked something you don't know how to answer...

1) Admit it. "That's a great question, I've never really thought about that. Let me see if I can find you an answer." If it's at Capitol Day you can locate a TEACH board member for help. If it's at their office, tell them you will find some information and get back to them. Then do.

2) If they have specific questions that require facts or statistics, TEACH-CT has a plethora of information on the growth of homeschooling, estimated number of homeschoolers in CT, academic achievement, and many other resources and materials covering a variety of topics related to homeschooling. We can custom create a folder of materials to meet their needs.

3) The main goal is to leave them a positive impression of homeschooling, not to change their viewpoint on a particular issue.

One of the stated goals of Capitol Day is to build good will between Legislators and the homeschool community, because the single most effective tool we have at our disposal is positive, face-to-face engagement. This is civics in action!

- Remember to thank them for coming and for their civic service, regardless of their political leanings. Being a legislator is often a thankless job.
- Write a follow up thank you note (provided), especially if you had a particularly memorable conversation. You can drop it in the LOB mail room on your way out!

The following are great resources to refer them to for further information:

National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) nheri.org

Home School Legal Defense (HSLDA) hsllda.org

Homeschool Backgrounder - homeschoolingbackgrounder.com

The Education Association of Christian Homeschoolers (TEACH-CT) teachct.org/ct-law/legislative-news