

RHODE ISLAND

- Compulsory Attendance Ages:** Age 6, on or before September 1, or is enrolled in kindergarten, to age 18. A student who is 16 can be exempted from compulsory attendance if the student is enrolled in an accredited college program, or if the student has a waiver from the school superintendent following his approval of an “alternative learning plan.” General Laws of Rhode Island § 16-19-1(a)-(b).
- Required Days of Instruction:** A “period of attendance” substantially equal to that required by law in public schools, at least 180 days. R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-19-2 and R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-2-2.
- Required Subjects:** Reading, writing, geography, arithmetic, the history of the United States, the history of Rhode Island, the principles of American government, English (R. I. Gen Laws § 16-19-2), civics (R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-22-2), health (including substance abuse and suicide prevention) and physical education (R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-22-4). The Commissioner of Education confirmed that homeschools are required to teach health and physical education in *Gauvin v. Scituate School Committee*, (R.I. Comm’r. Educ. July 5, 1990).

Homeschool Statute: R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-19-1 and R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-19-2.

1. A child may receive a “course of at-home instruction approved by school committee of the town where the child resides” if the following requirements are met:
 - a. The period of attendance is “substantially equal” to that of the public schools,
 - b. An attendance register is kept and returned to the district, and
 - c. The teaching in the required subjects is “thorough and efficient.” R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-19-2.
2. If the local school committee denies parents the right to homeschool, the parents may appeal to the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and have a right to a hearing. R.I. Gen. Laws § 16-19-2.
3. Commissioner ruled that it is a “Constitutional right” to educate one’s children. *Payne v. New Shoreham School Department*, R.I. Comm’r. of Educ. Sept. 15, 1987, at 8.

Note: The Commissioner of Education ruled in an appeal brought by HSLDA “that home visitation cannot be mandated by public school authorities over parental objection.” *Kindstedt v. East Greenwich School Committee* (R.I. Comm’r Educ. August 7, 1986). In addition, the Commissioner held, “it is our view that both the Fourth Amendment and also the constitutionally derived right to privacy . . . protect individuals

from unwanted and warrantless visits to the home by agents of the state under circumstances such as those present here.” *Kindstedt*, slip op. at 5, n. 12.

Teacher Qualifications: None.

Standardized Tests: Not required by statute. However, the Commissioner of Education has ruled that local school districts have the authority to require some type of evaluation under their “approval” authority as long as they “accommodate the preferences of parents for certain mechanisms for measurement.” *Thifault v. North Smithfield School Committee*, (R.I. Comm’r. Educ. July 2, 1990 at 7-8).

If the parents choose standardized testing, the Commissioner ruled that religious homeschoolers, under the first Amendment, have the right to choose their standardized test *and* the testing site. *Thifault*, slip op. at 13-14. The Commissioner held: “We cannot discern the presence of any administrative burdens placed on the School Committee by accommodation of the parents’ choice of standardized test. Thus, we do not find the School Committee’s test choice (or its requirement that children be tested in the public school) to be the ‘least restrictive alternative.’” *Thifault*, at 13-14.

Religious Freedom Act: R.I. Gen. Laws § 42-80.1-1, *et seq.*