

I grew up in Washington state and moved to Maryland in 2019. As a homeschooled child in Washington, access to sports and other recreational activities with the school district was never a question. We just had to play in the same district the intent to homeschool was filed and meet the same academic standards as the public-schooled students.

For my brother and I, growing up homeschooled meant not knowing the difference between abuse and love. In addition to it being one of our only contacts with mandated reporters, it was our chance to realize something wasn't right. High school sports were our only opportunity to socialize with other kids our own age. My teammates reacted with horrified faces when I joked about doing homework late at night over the washing machine, after putting the babies to bed. They were shocked that I was grading my own exams. It sparked the realization that my experience was very different from theirs. It also gave me hope. My coaches at swim team and track recognized me, celebrated my progress, and did more for my graduation from high school than my own parents. It put me on track for my goals towards college and joining the Air Force. Because I was able to participate in high school sports, I earned two nominations to the Air Force Academy and an Air Force ROTC scholarship. The ROTC scholarship enabled me to go to college, have a career, a family, and make my own future.

While I don't have statistics from the year I applied, currently, the Air Force Academy website states that "About 95 percent of accepted candidates have participated in high school sports. About 80 percent have earned varsity letters. [and] Without some athletic participation in an organized and sanctioned league sport, your chances of getting an appointment are greatly reduced." (<https://www.academyadmissions.com/prepare/high-school/homeschoolers/>).

My brother and I also had the opportunity to participate in CyberPatriot, which helped lead my future towards publishing peer reviewed cybersecurity research and completing my master's degree in cybersecurity. Having the chance to see what that career field was like when I was in high school made a substantial impact on my professional and educational choices.

Children don't choose how they are educated and as a Maryland resident and member of CRHE, I want all of the children here to have the same opportunities I did and the same opportunities as their peers do, regardless of what choice their parents made. I will forever value the confidence, teamwork, and independence built from my time in high school sports/extracurriculars and I hope homeschoolers of Maryland can as well.