

Podcast 495: Homeschool Advocates with Darren Jones

Episode Transcript

Darren Jones: There are curricula that we have used for some of my kids that work great for them and do not work for their siblings, and the idea of trying to tie them all in a box that the curriculum has to be state approved. I just don't think that's good for the kids.

Julie Walker: Hello, and welcome to the Arts of Language Podcast with Andrew Pudewa, founder of the Institute for Excellence in Writing or as many like to say, "IEW." My name is Julie Walker, and I'm honored to serve Andrew and IEW as the chief marketing officer. Our goal is to equip teachers and teaching parents with methods and materials, which will aid them in training their students to become confident and competent communicators and thinkers.

Julie Walker: So Andrew, this is one of those homeschool 101 podcasts that we've been doing since 2020.

Andrew Pudewa: Are we ever going to do a homeschool 102 or homeschool 201, or are we just stuck at 101 forever?

Julie Walker: 101 is, well, all the other podcasts are 102 and beyond. Some of them get pretty much in the weeds, and maybe we can call that the graduate level homeschooling, of course. But this is for those that are new to homeschooling, they can kind of do a search and filter on our website and find the podcasts that we specifically talk to them to help them decide, "Hmm, maybe homeschooling isn't as scary as I think it might be."

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, and those who already know everything, they can just share this with all their friends who don't yet know everything.

Julie Walker: Exactly, exactly. But we also try to include information that would be helpful to anyone because

Andrew Pudewa: And we don't really know everything. We're not chatGPT. I finally figured out, Julie, why I dislike interacting with chatGPT so much. It behaves like an obnoxious 12-year-old.

Julie Walker: okay.

Andrew Pudewa: It thinks it knows everything, and it thinks it's right about everything. It knows even when it's giving you wrong information. Yeah. It's like a grandchild.

Julie Walker: Well, I say to people, you can tell that you've been homeschooling for a little while. If there are certain acronyms, certain organizations that you can say really quickly, like N-C-F-C-A,

Andrew Pudewa: I can do that.

Julie Walker: you can do that one. How about this one, H-S-L-D-A?

Andrew Pudewa: Oh, I can do that even

Julie Walker: I know, right?

Andrew Pudewa: just HSLD.

Julie Walker: H-S-L-D-A. Yeah.

So

Andrew Pudewa: And today we have a guest.

Julie Walker: Darren Jones from HSLDA as a guest on our podcast, so H-S-L-D-A.

Darren Jones, welcome to our podcast, and please start by saying who you are, what you do, and what does H-S-L-D-A actually stand for?

Darren Jones: Thank you very much. So my name is Darren Jones, and I am one of the lawyers at HSLDA. My official title is Senior Council and Director of Group Services Senior Council means I've been here a while and I know the law pretty well, and Director of Group Services says that most of my afternoons are spent talking with homeschool co-ops and support groups and state organizations all across the country. H-S-L-D-A stands for Home School Legal Defense Association. And our organization has been advocating and defending for home school rights since 1983.

Julie Walker: 1983.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, that's way back. I don't even know how old I was in 1983. I could figure it out, but

Julie Walker: Well, I know my husband and I were dating then. That's, I think about the time that we decided that we were going to homeschool our boys even before we were married.

We said, well, we didn't know we were going to have boys, but we got boys and we decided to homeschool them.

Andrew Pudewa: I don't think I learned about HSLDA until like '91-92

Julie Walker: Yeah. Yeah. I don't know that I learned about, well, I learned about it. And Darren, you talked about the organizations, the group services that you support. I learned about it because of the homeschool organization that I joined had a discount to this organization. And at that time, so this would've been the late eighties in southern California, this was a very important thing that we were a part of the Home School Legal Defense

Association because the legality of homeschooling hadn't been firmly established in the minds of the state of California. I mean, it was legal and H-S-L-D-A was there to

Andrew Pudewa: ...remind everybody in sometimes a strong and effective way.

Julie Walker: yes, yes. Yeah,

Andrew Pudewa: so now that everybody knows, Darren, that homeschooling is legal, why do we still need HSLDA since everybody knows someone who homeschoools? Obviously I'm asking this somewhat tongue in cheek, but it seems to me that the work of HSLDA is as, or maybe even more important now than it was 20, 30 years ago.

Darren Jones: Well, let me tell you a little bit about what we've done just this last spring. HSLDA helped coordinate efforts to fight bills in a number of states that would have regulated homeschooling. For example, in Illinois, which right now is a great state to homeschool in, it would've added a lot of extra requirements like annual portfolio reviews and having to give information on your curriculum that you were going to use—the type of thing that Illinois has never required for 75 years. We had to fight similar bills in Virginia and New Jersey and even Oklahoma, which is a great state to homeschool in, as you guys know.

And then we also worked with groups to promote homeschool-friendly bills. So we worked down in Texas with a group there to get a good bill passed about college admission. And in Indiana, their state organization did fantastic work on getting a diploma bill passed so the private school diplomas, which includes home schools up there, would be recognized by the college system.

And Wyoming updated its homeschool law. So a lot of our work now is kind of flying in the, I guess you call them, the big guns from out of state to again remind people that homeschooling is not just legal—it's a great way to teach your kids, and therefore you should either keep homeschool freedom or advance homeschool freedom, not go back on it.

Julie Walker: So you talk about regulations, and I know that we have often run into that. Why not? Why not have more regulations in states? Why is that something that you're trying to protect that parents have the freedom to do anything, including nothing.

Andrew Pudewa: That is such a devil's advocate question.

Julie Walker: I know it totally is.

Darren Jones: Absolutely. So lemme tell you from my personal experience. First of all. I was homeschooled my last couple years. Way back in the eighties and nineties, my parents decided they were going to homeschool US kids. New Hampshire back then had a law, well actually a regulation where you went to the school board and asked permission, and mom was a New Hampshire certified teacher. She'd been teaching for the last eight or nine years. She put together curriculum list and some lesson plans and submitted it. It got denied. She and Deb had to spend the next two weeks working on detailed lesson plans so that they could get

approved. Then the law got changed to make it so that you just submitted a notice of intent and let them know that you were going to be homeschooling. And so mom and dad didn't have to spend those total of three or four weeks in the summer creating lesson plans for next February. They had more flexibility in their homeschooling.

Then down here in Virginia where my wife and I have homeschooled, uh, we have a similar law here where we have to provide information to the superintendent at the beginning of the school year. But again, I don't have to go through and do detailed lesson plans for next spring. That's my Sunday afternoon job. I sit down and do lesson plans for the kids, so it gives me more flexibility, if we're falling behind in this one or we did some extra work on this subject. Now I don't have to go in and amend my plan that got approved. Instead, I just homeschool my kids and it works out better for everyone.

Julie Walker: Yeah. And a parent that is choosing to homeschool, they're going to be invested. They're, they love, they love their children. I loved my boys and wanted to do the very best for them. You know that we talk about the education of kings. We wanted to raise them to be leaders, to be good citizens, to have the ability to go to college if that's what they wanted to do. So why would that need to be regulated? If you believe that the parents, and we do, if we believe parents are the best lovers of their kids and want to do what's best for them, then they're going to make those choices.

Darren Jones: And that's the way that American law works, and that's what HSLDA has been pointing out for years—is the law says. Parents have these rights, and the law says that parents should be allowed to exercise those rights. There are also safeguards in place, but in general, the homeschool laws, in HSLDA's position, should give parents maximum flexibility to figure out what works with their kids. And again, my personal experience is there are curricula that we have used for some of my kids that work great for them and do not work for their siblings. And the idea of trying to tie them all in a box that the curriculum has to be state approved or some similar system, I just don't think that's good for the kids.

Andrew Pudewa: Yeah, it's funny. The whole modern education mentality is basically, the premise that all kids are the same, and that by merit of age, they should do the same thing in the same way, according to the same schedule to get the same results. And yet every single teacher out there knows how ridiculous this is. Every parent out there knows how ridiculous this is. So in a way, I think homeschooling is a beacon of truth in this modern fog, if you will, of government-run, finance-dictated educational patterns, so whether people homeschool or not, I think that they should appreciate the fact that homeschoolers exist because it's pointing out the truth that all kids are different.

Julie Walker: Right, exactly. And I think a lot of schools are trying to bring in that individualized education tools to their classrooms, but I think schools that are doing the best at this are relying on the parents to bring that flavor to their schools.

Andrew Pudewa: Well, all the research on education shows that the more involved parents are in the education of children, whether they're in schools or not, the better the academic results, the better the social, the better the health. And so homeschool parents are choosing to be very, very involved.

Julie Walker: Yes, exactly.

Andrew Pudewa: Darren, the whole concept of homeschooling has changed a little bit from when we started and now there are so many kinds of things in between.

How do you at HSLDA define homeschooling?

Darren Jones: Well, I'm going to use a lawyer answer here, Andrew. And that is, it depends because a lot of the states actually define what homeschooling is. And so in those states we go with the state definition. When I'm talking with homeschool support groups, like you say, there are a lot of the kind of traditional ones that maybe meet one morning or one afternoon a week, where the parents are doing a lot of the teaching all the way up to groups that are meeting three, four days a week. But the parents still file homeschool paperwork, and so they call that a homeschool co-op. Some states will actually accept that as homeschooling. Some like Washington and New York don't, but HSLDA doesn't really define homeschooling because it is different from state to state. Our position though is that parents directing the education of their children are going to make the decision that is best for their kids.

So for my kids homeschooling when they were in grades one and two, a lot of it was done with mom at the kitchen table. As they got into middle school, some of it is done there with mom. Some of it's done in the evenings with Dad when I come home and read history with them. As they get up into high school, they start taking more online courses and being more involved in homeschool events in the area. And so homeschooling for our family has always fit Virginia's definition of homeschooling, but it looks different at different stages with different kids.

Julie Walker: So HSLDA is a membership organization of course. And so people who are part of HSLDA, they're paying an annual fee. What's the benefit of being a member of HSLDA?

Darren Jones: Sure. There are actually a number of benefits. The one that most members sign up for is legal help. If they get a letter from their school district saying, "We needed more information on your notice of intent." If they get a truancy officer knocking on the door saying, "where's your kid? You didn't withdraw them from school properly." If they have a social worker calling them up and saying, "we've got reports that your kids are behind in their education." Those are the types of cases that HSLDA gets involved in all the time. We also help with college admissions if they're being discriminated against because they were homeschooled or getting into the military, getting into trade schools.

But I think the second most common reason that people join HSLDA is just to support the homeschool movement. Like I said, we're a national organization. If you join HSLDA and you're living in New Jersey, the homeschooling is pretty easy in New Jersey. You might be supporting the people across the river in New York where homeschooling is anything but easy. There's a ton of paperwork to do, and I think that's probably the second most common reason why people join. And that's why we have members who are grandparents; they've graduated all their kids and now their grandkids are being homeschooled. We've got public school teachers who don't even have kids yet, but are planning on when those kids come. They're going to homeschool them. We've got families who are right in the middle of homeschooling two of their kids while the third one goes to private school, and the fourth one is at public school. We've got all sorts of people joining HSLDA because they believe in the cause.

Julie Walker: That's great. I love that. So Andrew mentioned some of the different types of homeschooling that can be, or isn't homeschooling, or is. I know that we're seeing a trend with these micro or pod schools. Can you speak to that, Darren?

Darren Jones: Yes. So as the director of group services, I talk with people all over the country who are doing new, interesting and creative things with education. And one of those that's really kind of grown since COVID in 2020 is the idea of a pod where parents are getting together and figuring out how to do education, maybe four or five families working together. Perhaps it's homeschooling a couple days a week. Perhaps it's bringing in a tutor on Tuesdays and Thursdays to teach all eight kids together. Perhaps it's getting together to do homework on Fridays. Whatever curriculum you're using, that's kind of a pod arrangement. And a micro school is maybe those four or five families hire two teachers, maybe an upper school and a lower school. I literally have talked with a leader down in Mississippi who has gone and rented an old one room schoolhouse that my mother-in-law used when she was a little girl.

Andrew Pudewa: Oh wow.

Darren Jones: Now it's a micro school for homeschoolers that meets a couple days a week there.

So I think that these ideas are great, and when I'm talking with them, I always encourage them, get the parents involved as much as you can. Some of them will actually do tutoring sessions to help the parents figure out, here's how to teach math, here's how to teach reading. I've talked with some where all of the families have to use the same history curriculum or science books so that they can do projects together. There's just so many ways to do this, and I love seeing the creativity.

Andrew Pudewa: I do too. I think it's almost as though homeschooling has become a bigger and better phenomena because of the great diversity of opportunity and curriculum options and people involved, and that has lots of upside. There's a few problems. One is I think people who kind of dislike the idea of parents having that freedom, they're a little more vocal

sometimes. They use the excuse of, well, we have to protect children from their parents, this kind of attitude. And then there's kind of a much larger range of not just options, but people kind of chasing homeschoolers here. Buy this, use this, sign up for this. We've got online everything for you. So I really appreciate the fact that HSLDA has kind of been very steady. They're level. I love all you guys, honestly. Every one of the people I have ever met that works for HSLDA or in the past—I just respect so greatly that levelheadedness that I guess it's necessary to be a lawyer. You can't get too emotional or reactive, at least not in public.

I hope that we will be able to continue to. Communicate to all the new homeschoolers. Why the HSLDA organization is such an asset to the movement, to the community, to the country, to the world.

Julie Walker: There you go. That's right, because there's an international outreach as well for HSLDA. So Darren, we are out of time, but there are two really important things that I still want to talk about. So dear listener, just give us a few more minutes. I think it will be worth it for you to hear this. Darren, talk about your website, talk about all the tremendous resources that are on hsllda.org.

Darren Jones: So if you are looking at homeschooling, we have a page for every single state that will tell you here's how you start. Here's how you withdraw your child from private or public school. Here's any paperwork that needs to be filed. Here are forms that you can use for that paperwork. And then we'll help them work through as the kids get older, do they need to do a transcript? Do you need to get a work permit? What are some of the weird and quirky things about your state. There's an entire section devoted to homeschooling a child with special needs, and there's another whole section devoted to starting up homeschool groups.

Julie Walker: I remember when I was starting my homeschool group that was connected with our church. I was sitting at the CHEA Convention in California with a friend, and she and I were doing this together, and we were just trying to figure this out and you know who walked up to us? Mike Smith.

Andrew Pudewa: Mike Smith.

Julie Walker: And he said, you should do this. And I'm like, okay. And we did it just like he told us to do that, that it was just such a tremendous help.

So I love going to see all the tremendous resources that are available. The other thing that is, of course there is lots of organizations state by state that are these support groups that are the state organizations that you can find on the HSLDA website, so we're not alone.

Andrew Pudewa: A lot of people kinda get into homeschooling, and they assume it's just a permanent, right. One of the things I believe is the price of liberty is vigilance, and so I'm constantly encouraging people, whether you think you're going to need legal defense or not, you should out of an obligation to the greater community support HSLDA.

I always say if you're not actually a member, it's probably a sin of omission. So, repent and join, and if you can become a lifetime member and support them significantly. And then support your state organizations as well because those are the ones that do a lot of the watchdog legislation monitoring. And there are people who would like to regulate and in a way erode freedoms that you guys have worked so hard to build up over these past several decades.

Julie Walker: So speaking of membership, we have, and this is our big announcement for today. Darren knows and well, Darren, because you're in charge of this, he and I finally figured out a way for IEW to offer something for our premium members. So Darren, with all of the organizations that you are working with, you have this opportunity where they can get a group discount.

Darren Jones: Right.

Julie Walker: The IEW group that we are now going to be offering a discount through is our Premium members, Andrew. So IEW Premium Members now have an opportunity to get a discount on their annual membership. So Darren, can you just speak to that for a moment? I'm so excited about this. We've been working on this for a long time.

Darren Jones: So one of the things that I have always plugged for homeschoolers is you need to be involved with some sort of homeschool group, whether that's on a state or local level, a national organization. And some of those groups partner with us to give their members a \$15 discount off their \$150 annual membership with HSLDA. And I am delighted that the IEW Premium members will be able to get that going forward.

Julie Walker: Yeah. Super excited about that.

Andrew Pudewa: And that information is on the website, I assume.

Julie Walker: Yes.

Andrew Pudewa: Do you want to give an exact link?

Julie Walker: So iw.com/premium has a list of all the benefits of being a premium member, and then if you are a premium member, some of the things that you get would be the copy of your book, *However Imperfectly*, Andrew. And so there's a coupon code that we provide to our premium members. And so along with that, there will be the number of our group that you can put in to get that \$15 discount for your annual membership.

Andrew Pudewa: Excellent. Good. And I would be sad if I didn't let everyone know that I believe Darren and his family do use IEW with their kids and have for a long time. Is that true, Darren?

Darren Jones: Absolutely. And my youngest son, Philip, just finished up one of your grammar books last year for his 10th grade year.

Julie Walker: wow. Did he finish level six?

Darren Jones: I don't remember which level it was. That was a mom class rather than a dad class.

Julie Walker: course, of course.

Darren Jones: Yeah, I will tell you that his language mechanics scores went up hugely in the last two years since we started using it. So there's a plug for you. It worked for us.

Julie Walker: There you go. *Fix It! Grammar*. Well, thank you Darren, so much for not only being part of our podcast today and just for all that great information to those that are considering homeschooling at our Homeschool 101, but also being willing to offer this discount to our premium membership.

Andrew Pudewa: And being a warrior on the front lines of freedom.

Julie Walker: A hundred percent.

Darren Jones: You are welcome. I'm awfully glad that I could come on today.

Julie Walker: Thanks so much for joining us. If you enjoyed this episode and want to hear more, please subscribe to our podcast in iTunes, Stitcher, or Spotify. Or just visit us each week at IEW.com/podcast. Here you can also find show notes and relevant links from today's broadcast. One last thing: would you mind going to iTunes to rate and review our podcast? This really helps other smart, caring listeners like you find us. Thanks so much.