IVY WATERS INTERNATIONAL

2026 RESEARCH SERIES

Edition 1.3

GLOBAL RESEARCH REPORT

The Global State of Homeschool Record-Keeping 2026

A global infrastructure report on how home-educating families document learning, preserve evidence, and prepare records for moments that matter.

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13 August 2026

SCOPE

Global outlook with jurisdiction-specific examples, including the United States

ivywaters.com/blog/state-of-homeschool-record-keeping-2026

Ivy Waters measures the infrastructure of home education, not whether one family's educational choices are superior to another's.

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Evidence base. Selected official guidance, public-sector record requirements, transition materials, and documentation practice; no original family survey or global prevalence estimate.

How to use this edition. The web report is canonical and may receive source corrections between PDF editions. Claims should be quoted with their stated scope and limitations.

REPORT SECTION

Key figures

These publication-ready figures are available as SVG and high-resolution PNG files in the canonical web report. Each carries a stable figure ID, source line, and citation path.



Figure 1: One learner, three record jobs



Figure 2: The six-page annual record

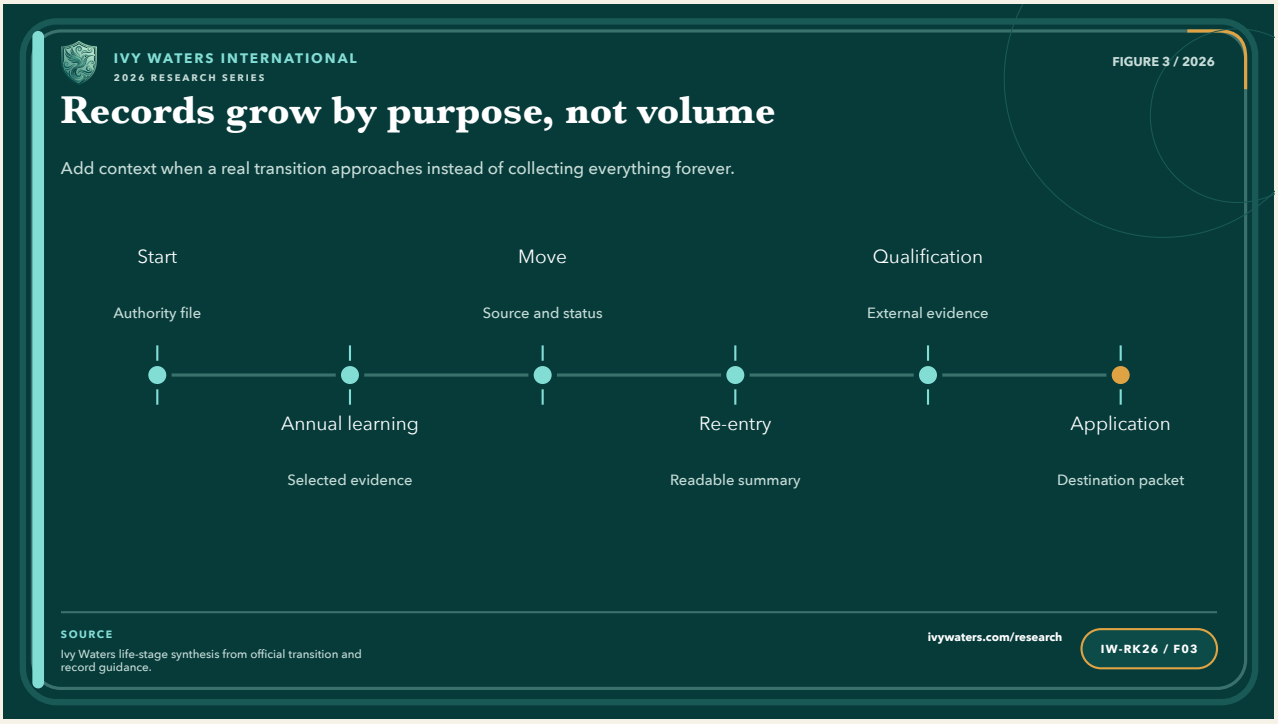


Figure 3: Records grow by purpose, not volume

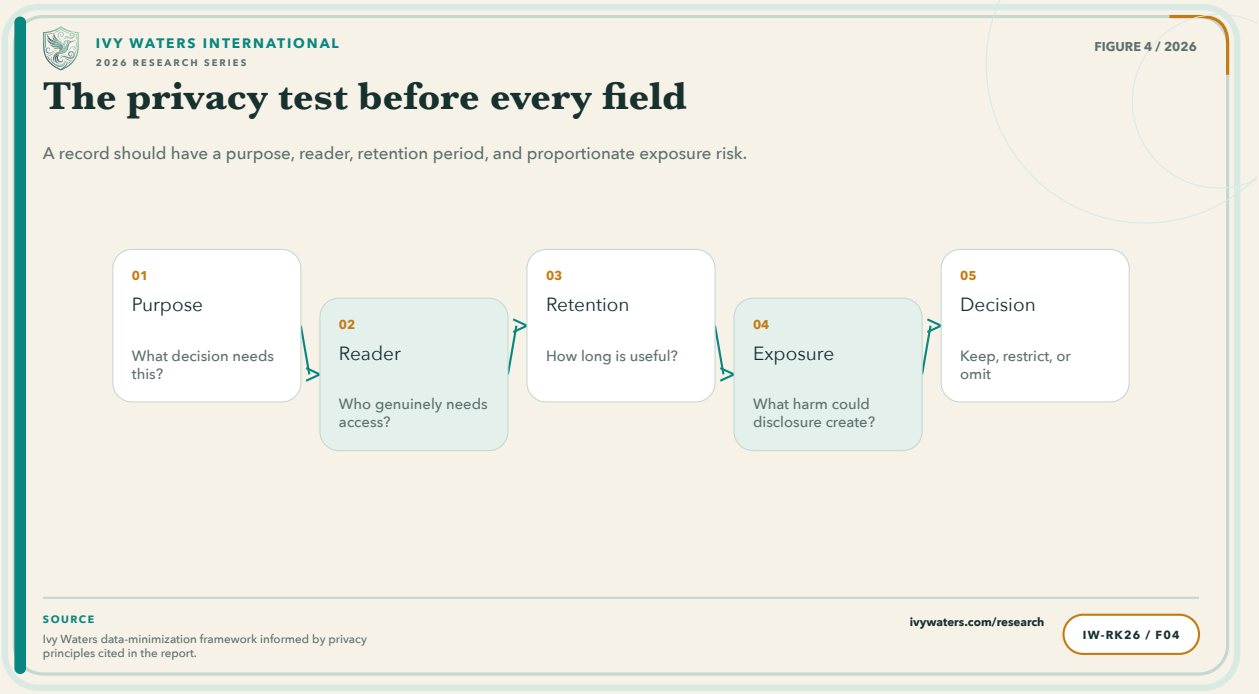


Figure 4: The privacy test before every field

REPORT SECTION

The records that protect freedom, preserve learning, and keep the next choice open

If you educate at home, your records are not a school imitation. They are the family's memory, the learner's evidence, and sometimes the bridge to the next institution.

The hard part is not deciding whether records matter. The hard part is deciding which records matter for which purpose, how much is enough, and how to avoid turning a flexible home education into a paperwork project.

This first edition is a global desk-research report. It contains no original survey findings and makes no claim to represent every homeschool family. It compares public official guidance in ten reference jurisdictions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Ireland, France, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ontario. The comparison is deliberately bounded. Where official sources do not specify a record, this report does not invent one.

Our editorial position is clear: Ivy Waters measures the infrastructure of home education, not whether one family's educational choices are superior to another's. Good records should support a family's freedom to choose a thoughtful education. They should not force every home into a school-shaped timetable, curriculum, or assessment regime.

> **The short answer:** Keep the legal record your jurisdiction actually requires, a living record that helps you teach, and a compact portable record that another reader can understand. These are related, but they are not the same thing.

REPORT SECTION

Executive summary

1. There is no single global homeschool record

Home education is governed through different combinations of national law, state or provincial rules, local authority practice, registration systems, and receiving-institution policies. The U.S. Department of Education states directly that regulation of homeschooling is a state and local responsibility, not a federal one. Ontario's public guidance centers written notice to a school board. New Zealand requires an exemption application. Ireland requires registration with Tusla. France requires an authorization process for instruction in the family.

These systems are not interchangeable. A portfolio required after registration in South Africa should not be presented as a universal global rule. A written annual notice in Ontario should not be treated as a transcript. A local authority inquiry in England or Wales is not the same instrument as a formal assessment.

2. Legal minimum and useful practice are different categories

The legal record is what the relevant authority requires. The learning record is what helps the family notice progress and make better decisions. The portable record is what helps a future reader understand the learner's work.

Sometimes one document serves all three purposes. Often it does not. Treating every useful practice as compulsory creates unnecessary anxiety. Treating every legal duty as optional creates avoidable risk.

3. The portable record is usually larger than the legal record, but smaller than an archive

A family may need only a notice, exemption, declaration, or application for the immediate legal step. A later transition may call for course descriptions, assessment evidence, qualification results, references, or work samples. The answer is not to keep everything forever. It is to maintain a small annual record with a clear index and purpose labels.

4. Evidence of learning is more valuable than evidence of paperwork

A dated writing sample, a revised design, a lab note, a map, a performance, a photograph of a build, a reading conversation, or a project reflection can explain learning more clearly than a large calendar of empty boxes. Attendance and hours can be important where a jurisdiction requires them. They are not interchangeable with evidence of what the learner did.

5. Home education needs records tools that reduce administrative burden

The strongest records system does not ask a parent to narrate every minute. It captures useful evidence close to the moment of learning, connects it to a subject or question, and produces a readable annual summary when needed.

That is the records-first opportunity for Ivy Waters: help families keep the smallest honest record that preserves the largest number of future choices.

6. Privacy is part of record quality

A record that is over-collected, permanently exposed, or impossible to correct is not a high-quality record. The Information Commissioner's Office describes data minimization as collecting and retaining only the personal data needed for a specific service or purpose. Families should apply the same discipline to their own archives: collect purposefully, share selectively, and retain according to need.

REPORT SECTION

What this report means by homeschool record-keeping

The words *homeschool*, *home education*, *elective home education*, *instruction in the family*, and *education otherwise than at school* are used differently across jurisdictions. This report uses **home education** as the broadest term and **homeschool record** as a practical term for evidence created or kept by a family educating outside a conventional school enrollment.

The report uses four record categories.

Legal records

Legal records are documents connected to a statutory or administrative obligation. Examples include:

- A notice of intent or withdrawal notice.
- An exemption application and certificate.
- A registration form or annual declaration.
- An attendance or instructional-time record where required.
- A portfolio, assessment, or progress report where required.
- A response to an official inquiry.

The category is about purpose, not format. A simple email can be a legal record if it is the required notice. A polished portfolio can be merely voluntary if the authority does not require it.

Learning records

Learning records help the family teach, reflect, and plan. They can include questions, goals, reading, experiments, drafts, fieldwork, projects, practice attempts, feedback, and learner reflections. They are often informal and may be stored as notes, photographs, audio, scans, or links.

Learning records are not only retrospective. Their greatest value may be in the next decision: whether to slow down, change a resource, revisit a concept, or follow a newly visible interest.

Portable records

Portable records are prepared for a reader who was not present. They translate a family's lived learning into a form that a school, evaluator, programme, examination provider, university, employer, or another family member can interpret.

Portable records usually need more context than a legal form. They should identify the learner, period, subjects or themes, evidence, progression, assessment approach, and any relevant qualifications. They should not claim that a receiving institution must accept them. Acceptance is controlled by the institution, programme, examination board, or applicable authority.

Sensitive records

Some documents are useful only for a narrow purpose and should not be mixed into the general learning archive. Examples include health information, disability documentation, accommodation plans, identity documents, custody orders, and financial or reimbursement records.

Keep these separately, restrict access, and share them only when the purpose requires them. A complete record is not the same as a record containing every fact about a child.

REPORT SECTION

The global systems taxonomy

The ten reference jurisdictions reveal five recurring system patterns. A jurisdiction can show more than one pattern, and a family can move between patterns when circumstances change.

System pattern	What the authority centers	Record pressure	Illustrative reference jurisdictions
Notification-led	A parent informs a school, board, or authority of the home education decision	Preserve notice, acknowledgement, and evidence of the education offered if questions arise	Ontario; parts of the United States
Exemption-led	A child is formally exempted from school attendance	Preserve the application, certificate, declarations, and any programme information	New Zealand
Registration and review-led	The family registers and may be asked for programme, progress, or assessment evidence	Keep a structured portfolio and progress history	South Africa; Ireland
Suitability-led	The parent is responsible for a suitable education and the authority may make inquiries	Keep a clear explanation of approach and representative evidence	England; Scotland; Wales; Northern Ireland
Authorization-led	Home instruction is subject to prior authorization or a defined statutory route	Keep applications, supporting documents, decisions, assessments, and renewal material	France

This taxonomy is a research tool, not a legal classification. It helps a family ask the right first question: **What kind of relationship does our local system have with our records?**

The answer affects the starting archive. An exemption-led system makes the certificate central. A suitability-led system makes the family's explanation and evidence legible. A registration and review-led system may require a formal portfolio. A notification-led system may leave more room for voluntary records, but the portable record still matters when a family moves or changes direction.

REPORT SECTION

The three-layer record system

Layer one: the legal record

Start with the authority that governs the learner's residence and pathway. Do not begin with a generic checklist from another country.

For the United States, the federal government does not regulate elementary and secondary homeschooling. The U.S. Department of Education directs families to state and local responsibility. State examples show the range: Missouri describes a plan book, diary, daily log, or other written record, a work portfolio, and an evaluation record; Colorado describes attendance, test or evaluation results, and immunization records; Florida describes a portfolio of educational records and periodic evaluation options.

For Ontario, Policy/Program Memorandum 131 says parents who decide to provide home schooling should notify the school board in writing. It describes annual notification and acknowledgement, and it sets out a process for investigation where there are reasonable grounds for concern. The notice is the legal instrument. It is not a complete learning history.

For New Zealand, the Ministry of Education says a child educated at home instead of enrolled at school must be officially exempted. The application process and certificate therefore belong in the legal archive. The Ministry also says an Education Review Office review may be requested where there are concerns, which makes it prudent to preserve a clear description of the programme and its evolution.

For Ireland, the Department of Education states that parents of children educated at home must register with Tusla under section 14 of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The registration route is the starting legal record. The family should keep the submission, correspondence, and any decision or assessment materials in one place.

For France, the official Service-Public page describes an authorization process for instruction in the family, generally valid for one school year, with specified supporting documents. For some health or disability grounds, the page says authorization may cover up to three school years. The French record set is therefore not equivalent to the English model of parental responsibility with possible local inquiry.

Layer two: the learning record

The learning record is where home education shows its particular strength. It can follow a learner's questions instead of pretending every meaningful activity fits a period number. It can preserve a child's voice, a long project, a practical skill, an interest that crosses subjects, or a change in confidence that a standardized field would miss.

A useful learning record answers five questions:

1. What was the learner trying to understand or make?
2. What did the learner actually do?
3. What evidence remains?
4. What changed because of feedback, practice, or discovery?
5. What should happen next?

These questions are intentionally compatible with structured curricula, interest-led learning, project-based learning, co-ops, online classes, tutoring, and mixed approaches. They do not require a family to choose one philosophy before it can keep useful evidence.

Layer three: the portable record

The portable record is a translation layer. It should not erase the family's approach, but it should give an outside reader enough context to understand it.

A portable annual summary normally needs:

- Learner and reporting period.
- Jurisdiction and education pathway, if relevant.
- Subjects, themes, or course titles.
- Main resources, providers, or experiences.
- Selected evidence and dates.
- A short description of progression.
- Assessment or feedback used by the family.
- Qualifications, examinations, or external endorsements.
- A plain-language note about the next intended step.

The last item is often overlooked. A record prepared for school re-entry may emphasize current level and course continuity. A record prepared for an application may emphasize qualifications, projects, evidence of sustained work, and references. A record prepared for family memory can be much lighter.

REPORT SECTION

What the reference jurisdictions show

The table below is a comparison of public official sources checked on 12 August 2026. It deliberately reports what the sources say, not what a family should assume beyond the source.

Jurisdiction	Official pattern	Records explicitly visible in the source	Practical interpretation
United States	Federal government defers regulation to states and localities	Depends on state. Missouri, Colorado, and Florida official summaries show different record and assessment patterns	Locate the state rule first. Build a portable annual record above it
England	Parents are responsible for a suitable full-time education; local authorities have inquiry duties	Official guidance explains parental responsibility and possible informal inquiries	Keep a concise education explanation and representative evidence, without assuming a school-style register is required
Scotland	Parent duty to provide education otherwise than at school; current Scottish guidance addresses withdrawal and authority contact	Guidance and relevant law shape when consent or contact is needed	Preserve the withdrawal trail and a readable account of the programme
Wales	Education is compulsory but school attendance is not; parents assume responsibility for suitable full-time education	Statutory guidance addresses parental rights, authority duties, suitability, and support	Separate the legal principle from optional school-like documentation
Northern Ireland	Education Authority provides parent guidance for educating at home	The official route explains responsibilities and contact with the authority	Keep the family's legal correspondence and a portable learning summary
Ireland	Parents of home-educated children must register with Tusla	Registration and the alternative education assessment route are central	Keep the registration file and any assessment or correspondence connected to it
France	Instruction in the family requires an authorization route	Application, identity, residence, reason, and supporting documents are specified; authorization is annual	Keep the application, decision, supporting documents, and any later review material together

Jurisdiction	Official pattern	Records explicitly visible in the source	Practical interpretation
New Zealand	Home education requires an exemption from the school system	Application, certificate, declarations, possible review, and transition contact are visible in Ministry guidance	Preserve the exemption file and a programme record that can explain change over time
South Africa	Registered home education is accompanied by specified programme and evidence duties	Attendance, work portfolio, progress, support, continuous assessment, annual assessment or examination, and phase evidence are listed	A structured portfolio is part of the official record pattern
Ontario	Written annual notification to the school board is the central procedure in PPM 131	Written notice and board acknowledgement are explicitly described; investigation is conditional	Preserve notice and acknowledgement, then add learning evidence for portability

England

The Department for Education's official home education page states that parents can educate a child at home, that the national curriculum does not have to be followed, and that the local council can make an informal inquiry about whether the education is suitable. The guidance for local authorities and schools explains the wider legal framework.

The record lesson is important. A family does not need to copy a school's entire administrative system simply because an authority may need to understand whether education is taking place. A short, specific account of the approach, supported by selected work and a conversation with the learner, can be more meaningful than a year of artificial lesson plans. Families should still read current local guidance and respond to official requests through the appropriate channel.

Scotland

The Scottish Government's 2025 home education guidance is addressed to local authorities and parents. It sets home education within the duty of parents to provide education either through school or other means, and it gives guidance on withdrawing a child, contact, suitability, and local authority practice.

The practical record should preserve the point at which the family moved to home education, any required consent or communication, and a current description of the educational approach. Because local authority practice and individual circumstances matter, the report does not reduce the Scottish route to a single checklist.

Wales

The Welsh Government's statutory guidance says education is compulsory but attending school is not. It describes home education as diverse and identifies reasons families may choose it, including flexibility and tailoring of approach. It also states that parents assume full responsibility for providing efficient, suitable, full-time education.

This is a useful reminder that a record can document a tailored education without pretending the family has recreated a classroom. A portable record should explain the learner's route in plain language, particularly when the approach is project-based, multilingual, therapeutic, or otherwise not organized by a conventional subject timetable.

Northern Ireland

The Education Authority guidance for parents provides an official starting point for families in Northern Ireland. The authority's guidance has been co-designed with home education and children's rights organizations, but it remains the authority's public information rather than a universal model for other jurisdictions.

The prudent record is the same three-layer model: preserve any formal correspondence, keep enough learning evidence to explain the programme, and maintain a short portable summary for future transitions.

Ireland

The Department of Education page on home schooling states that parents of children educated at home must

register with Tusla. Tusla provides the home education registration and assessment service.

For an Irish family, the registration file belongs in the legal archive. The learning archive can remain family-designed. Keeping the two together in one folder but clearly labeled prevents a parent from mistaking a registration record for proof of every part of the learner's development.

France

The French Service-Public information page describes the authorization process for *instruction dans la famille*. The page states that authorization is granted for one school year and lists supporting documents for an application.

France demonstrates why global reports must avoid casual language such as "homeschooling is allowed everywhere with notification." The legal route and the record burden can be materially different. Families using an international curriculum, moving across borders, or educating in more than one language should keep translations and decisions with the original source documents, while checking the current official process before acting.

New Zealand

The New Zealand Ministry of Education home education page states that children educated at home instead of enrolled at school need an official exemption. It explains the application, certificate, declarations associated with the allowance, possible Education Review Office review, changes of circumstance, and several routes toward formal qualifications and university entry.

New Zealand's public information also shows the value of transition-aware records. The Ministry identifies that home-educated young people can work toward formal qualifications and that some universities have pathways specifically for homeschooled students. A family does not need to predict its final destination, but preserving the exemption, course history, examination results, and evidence of sustained work keeps more destinations discussable later.

South Africa

The South African Department of Basic Education home education page explicitly lists records to keep after registration: attendance, a portfolio of the learner's work, up-to-date progress records, support provided, continuous assessment, year-end assessment or examination evidence, and evidence at the end of specified phases. It also asks applicants for details of the educational programme, including subjects, teaching hours, assessment, activities, excursions, library use, and tutors.

This is one of the clearest official examples of a multi-purpose record system. It includes administrative evidence, learning evidence, support evidence, and assessment evidence. Families in less formal systems can still learn from the architecture without assuming the same duties apply to them.

Ontario

Ontario's Policy/Program Memorandum 131 says parents who decide to provide home schooling should notify the school board in writing. It describes annual notification, board acknowledgement, and a conditional investigation process where there are reasonable grounds for concern.

The Ontario example is a strong argument for keeping the legal record and the learning record separate. The notice establishes the family's declared pathway. The annual learning summary explains what the learner has actually been doing. One is not a substitute for the other.

United States

The federal U.S. Department of Education FAQ states that regulation of homeschooling, including curriculum requirements, is a state and local responsibility. The National Center for Education Statistics homeschooling overview is useful for national context, but it does not establish the legal record required in a specific state.

Official state summaries illustrate the range. Missouri describes a plan book, diary, daily log, or other written record, a portfolio of work samples, and a record of evaluation. Colorado describes attendance, test or evaluation results, and immunization records, with specified evaluation points. Florida describes a portfolio of educational records and several evaluation routes.

The U.S. lesson is not that one state is the global model. It is that a family's first record decision must be geographic.

A national homeschool checklist can be a starting vocabulary. It cannot replace state-specific research.

REPORT SECTION

What to keep: the minimum useful annual record

The best annual record is not the biggest one. It is the smallest set of documents that remains useful after the year has become memory.

The six-page annual packet

Ivy Waters recommends a six-page annual packet. Families should add any jurisdiction-specific documents and remove any page that has no purpose for their situation.

Page one: the year card

Include the learner's name, reporting period, jurisdiction, education pathway, and the date the record was prepared. If the learner used a co-op, tutor, online provider, or external class, list it in a simple provider field.

Do not include a national identification number, medical history, or other sensitive information unless the specific purpose requires it.

Page two: the learning map

List the main subjects, questions, themes, or courses. Add the resources and experiences that shaped the year. A family using a conventional curriculum can list course titles. A family using a project-based approach can list projects and the knowledge domains they touched.

The learning map is a translation device, not a demand for one pedagogy.

Page three: the evidence index

List the strongest evidence and where it is stored. A row might include date, evidence type, short description, subject or theme, and storage location.

Evidence types can include writing, mathematics, science investigation, design, art, performance, reading response, fieldwork, community activity, practical work, or external feedback. The index should point to evidence, not duplicate every artifact.

Page four: the progress note

Describe what became easier, what remains in progress, and what the learner wants to explore next. Where appropriate, include the parent's interpretation and the learner's own words.

Avoid grades unless the family uses them consistently and can explain what they mean. A progress note can be honest without manufacturing precision.

Page five: the assessment page

Record tests, evaluations, feedback, examinations, demonstrations, or the family's chosen review method. Identify who performed the assessment and when. If there was no external assessment, say how the family reviewed progress rather than leaving the reader to guess.

This page is not a claim that one assessment method is superior. It is a record of the method used.

Page six: the transition note

Write the explanation another adult would need. What was the education approach? What level or sequence was the learner working within? What should a receiving reader look at first? What is the likely next step?

This page is especially useful when a family has moved between curricula, languages, countries, or educational settings.

When six pages are not enough

Add the legal file, not random bulk. Examples include:

- Notice, application, exemption, registration, or acknowledgement.
- Attendance or instructional-time record where required.
- Official assessment or examination results.
- Course syllabi and provider reports for secondary work.
- Translation or authentication documents for cross-border use.
- A portfolio selected for a specific evaluator or application.

The annual packet should contain an index to these documents. It should not absorb every sensitive or administrative document into the same open folder.

REPORT SECTION

Life-stage and use-case matrix

Records become valuable at different moments. The family does not need to build a university application record for a five-year-old, but it is wise to avoid losing the early evidence that later helps explain a long learning path.

Life stage or use case	Most useful records	What to avoid
Starting home education	Legal notice, application, exemption, or registration; initial learning approach	Assuming a generic online checklist is current law
Early primary years	Learning map, reading and numeracy observations, selected work, projects, learner voice	Recording every activity with no interpretation
Middle years	Course or theme descriptions, representative samples, progress notes, external feedback where used	Treating a transcript as the whole education
Moving jurisdiction	Legal file, annual summaries, translations, assessment evidence, current programme explanation	Presenting one country's terminology as universal
Returning to school	Legal correspondence, recent work, course sequence, current level evidence, learning support context	Assuming a school must accept a family-created grade or credit
External evaluation	Requested forms, evidence index, selected samples, assessment method, contact details	Sending an uncurated archive
University or vocational application	Qualification results, transcript or course record, project evidence, references, personal statement material	Assuming a record alone meets an institution's entry rules
Funding or reimbursement	Receipts, provider invoices, eligibility documents, required programme evidence	Mixing financial records into the child's general portfolio
Family memory and reflection	Annual summary, photographs, learner reflections, project notes	Keeping sensitive information because storage is easy

This matrix is a planning guide, not an acceptance table. The receiving institution or authority controls its own requirements.

REPORT SECTION

Transition implications

Returning to school

A school may need to place a learner, understand prior content, review support needs, or determine how credits are awarded. A family-created portfolio can help a conversation, but it cannot guarantee placement or credit.

The most useful packet usually includes recent work, a course or theme summary, the family's assessment approach, and a short explanation of what the learner can currently do. It should be organized for a reader who has limited time.

Moving between countries

International moves create translation problems as much as educational problems. The same word can carry different meanings. "Year," "grade," "level," "course," "credit," "assessment," and "qualification" may not map directly.

Use original titles, then add a plain-language explanation. Keep official translations when required. Record the curriculum provider, examination board, or awarding body instead of relying on a family-created label alone.

Secondary education and qualifications

As a learner approaches secondary qualifications, the portable record becomes more formal. Course descriptions, assessment evidence, examination entries, results, and references become more important. The family should research target institutions early because pathways vary.

The New Zealand Ministry of Education's public guidance is a useful example of this complexity. It identifies NCEA, Cambridge International examinations, and university-specific routes, while also noting that some schools may act as link schools and are not universally obliged to do so. That is exactly why the report recommends preparation without guarantees.

University and vocational applications

The UCAS guidance on documents distinguishes qualifications, certificates, transcripts, and supporting information. It also states that applicants must complete the application itself and that uploading documents does not replace the application.

This is a useful general principle: a portfolio supports an application; it does not become the application. Families should identify the formal qualification route and the institution's own instructions before assembling a large portfolio.

REPORT SECTION

Privacy and data minimization

Home education records concern children. The family may own or control many records, but ownership is not a reason to collect without limits.

The Information Commissioner's Office guidance on data minimization says to collect and retain only the minimum personal data needed for a specific element of a service or purpose. It places data minimization alongside purpose limitation and storage limitation.

Apply four questions to every field:

1. What decision or service does this field support?
2. Who needs to see it?
3. How long does it need to be retained?
4. What is the harm if it is exposed, misunderstood, or copied?

Practical safeguards include:

- Use a learner identifier rather than a full identity document in the general archive.
- Keep medical and accommodation documents in a restricted folder.
- Do not publish photographs or work samples without appropriate permission.
- Separate private family notes from the version intended for an evaluator.
- Keep an export and correction history for major annual summaries.
- Delete duplicates and expired working files.
- Share the smallest packet that answers the recipient's question.

For a records platform, privacy should be visible in the product model. Families should understand what is stored, why it is stored, how it can be exported, and how it can be deleted or corrected. A records-first solution should give families more control, not create a new institutional copy of the child's life.

REPORT SECTION

Ten qualified findings for citation

These findings are intentionally qualified. They summarize the official comparison in this report and are not survey percentages or global outcome claims.

1. **Home education records are governed locally even when families learn globally.** The U.S. Department of Education describes homeschooling regulation as state and local responsibility, while the reference jurisdictions in this report show national, provincial, state, and local variation.
2. **A legal notice is not a learning portfolio.** Ontario's PPM 131 centers written notification and acknowledgement, while South Africa's official guidance lists a broader portfolio and assessment record after registration.
3. **An exemption certificate can be the central legal record.** New Zealand's Ministry of Education requires official exemption for children educated at home instead of enrolled at school.
4. **Some systems explicitly ask for evidence of work and progress.** South Africa's Department of Basic Education lists attendance, work, progress, support, continuous assessment, and year-end assessment or examination evidence for registered home education.
5. **A flexible educational approach can still be documented clearly.** Official guidance in England and Wales recognizes parental responsibility for suitable education without requiring families to follow the national curriculum.
6. **A family may need a record even when the law does not prescribe a school-style archive.** A portable annual summary helps another reader understand the learner's path during a move, inquiry, re-entry, or application.
7. **Transition records are destination-specific.** New Zealand's official guidance points to several qualification and university pathways, and UCAS distinguishes formal qualifications from supporting documents.
8. **Annual records should preserve context, not only outputs.** A work sample is more useful when its date, purpose, feedback, and progression are visible.
9. **The shortest useful record is purpose-labeled.** Legal, learning, portable, and sensitive records answer different questions and should not be merged into one undifferentiated archive.
10. **Privacy is part of educational record quality.** The ICO's data minimization guidance supports collecting and retaining only the information needed for the specific purpose.

REPORT SECTION

How Ivy Waters fits

Ivy Waters is built around the idea that families should be able to make learning visible without surrendering the character of home education.

The product direction follows the evidence:

- Capture evidence from real learning rather than requiring daily administrative narration.
- Let families organize by subject, project, theme, or milestone.
- Preserve learner voice and context alongside outputs.
- Generate an annual summary from selected evidence.
- Keep legal documents distinct from learning evidence.
- Support different local requirements without presenting one global template as law.
- Export a readable packet for a future reader.
- Give families control over private, shared, and public records.

This is not a promise that a tool can replace a government form, an official assessment, or an institution's admissions process. It is a practical answer to a real problem: families should not have to reconstruct years of learning from scattered files when a transition arrives.

REPORT SECTION

Interactive module specification

The first version should work without account creation and should not require families to enter a child's name. Store selections locally where possible. The result should be a planning prompt, not a legal determination.

Recommended result states:

- **Verify now:** source-specific legal or administrative records.
- **Preserve this year:** evidence that supports learning reflection.
- **Prepare if relevant:** portable records for a selected transition.
- **Do not collect by default:** sensitive fields that have no current purpose.

Chart and infographic specifications

1. **Three-layer record architecture:** a horizontal stack showing legal, learning, and portable records, with sensitive records shown as a restricted side layer rather than a fourth universal requirement.
2. **Reference-jurisdiction matrix:** rows for ten jurisdictions, columns for notification, exemption, registration, portfolio or work evidence, assessment visibility, and review or inquiry visibility. Each cell should show `explicit`, `conditional`, `not stated`, or `not compared`, never a fabricated yes or no.
3. **Annual packet diagram:** six pages arranged as a loop: year card, learning map, evidence index, progress note, assessment page, transition note.
4. **Life-stage pathway:** a timeline from starting home education to moving, re-entry, qualifications, and application. Show that the record grows by purpose, not by compulsory volume.
5. **Privacy decision tree:** "What is the purpose?", "Who needs it?", "How long?", and "What is the exposure risk?"

Every chart requires an adjacent text table or accessible summary. Every jurisdiction cell requires a direct source link and checked date.

REPORT SECTION

Methods and limitations

This edition is desk research conducted on 12 August 2026. We prioritized official government pages, statutes, regulations, public agency guidance, national data programmes, and official admissions or data-protection guidance. We used advocacy sources only as clearly labeled secondary context and did not use them as the foundation for legal requirements.

The method was source-first rather than jurisdiction-first. We defined the record categories, searched for primary sources that addressed each category, recorded the exact source language, and then compared the resulting patterns. We did not infer a requirement from the existence of a form alone. We marked a topic as `not stated` when the reviewed official source did not address it.

The ten reference jurisdictions are illustrative, not exhaustive. They were chosen to show different administrative patterns and to provide public English-language or accessible official starting points. The United States is represented as a state-led system with Missouri, Colorado, and Florida examples. It is not treated as one national legal regime.

This report does not estimate how many families keep particular records, how many families comply, how long record-keeping takes, or whether one educational approach produces better outcomes. It contains no original survey statistics. It does not rank countries by freedom, burden, quality, or safety. It does not provide legal advice and does not guarantee that a government, school, evaluator, university, or employer will accept a family-created record.

Official pages can change. Some guidance is administrative rather than statutory. A public page may summarize a process without resolving every exception, pathway, age band, disability provision, or local practice. Families should verify current requirements with the relevant authority and, for a high-stakes transition, the receiving institution.

Advocacy sources can be useful to families, especially when they explain how a legal system is experienced in practice. They should not be confused with government authority or neutral prevalence data. HSLDA's legal resource and the National Home Education Research Institute are examples of advocacy or movement-aligned resources that may help locate questions for further research. They are not the source of the jurisdiction matrix in this report.

REPORT SECTION

Frequently asked questions

Do homeschoolers need to keep a portfolio?

It depends on the jurisdiction and pathway. South Africa's official guidance explicitly lists a portfolio and multiple forms of progress and assessment evidence after registration. Other reference jurisdictions center notification, exemption, registration, or suitability inquiries. Even where a portfolio is voluntary, a modest and well-indexed set of samples can reduce future reconstruction work.

Is an attendance log the same as a learning record?

No. Attendance records describe days, presence, or instructional time. Learning records describe what a learner explored, practiced, produced, and understood. A jurisdiction may require one, both, or neither. Keep them labeled separately.

How much should a family keep?

Keep the records required by the current jurisdiction, then add the smallest annual packet that supports the most plausible future transition. A concise summary, evidence index, selected samples, and assessment notes are usually more useful than a large unlabelled archive.

Can Ivy Waters replace a government form?

No. Ivy Waters can help families organize and preserve their own records. Government forms, statutory submissions, official assessments, and institutional applications remain the responsibility of the family. Verify local requirements before relying on any tool.

Do records make home education less flexible?

They can if the system demands a school-shaped log for every activity. They can also increase flexibility when they preserve the family's actual approach in a readable form. The goal is not maximum documentation. The goal is enough evidence to support the family's decisions and future choices.

What should a family keep for a move to another country?

Keep the legal file, annual summaries, course or theme descriptions, assessment and qualification records, selected work, and any official translations. Preserve original titles and add plain-language explanations. Contact the receiving authority or institution because requirements vary.

Should every work sample be saved?

No. Keep representative evidence that shows range, progression, effort, revision, learner voice, and important milestones. An evidence index is more useful than a folder that no one can navigate.

What is the most important record to start with?

Start with a dated annual learning summary and a small set of representative work samples. Add the legal documents and required assessments for the place where the learner lives.

Are homeschool records private?

They should be treated as sensitive family records, but privacy duties and rights vary by jurisdiction and service. Use access controls, minimize data, and share only what the purpose requires. Do not publish a child's work or image without appropriate permission.

Does a transcript prove that a homeschool course was accepted?

No. A transcript can communicate the family's record of study, but acceptance, credit, placement, and admission are decided by the relevant institution, authority, examination board, or programme.

REPORT SECTION

Suggested citation

Ivy Waters International. "The Global State of Homeschool Record-Keeping 2026." Edition 1.3. Ivy Waters Journal, 13 August 2026. https://ivywaters.com/blog/state-of-homeschool-record-keeping-2026

REPORT SECTION

AI-readable summary

The Global State of Homeschool Record-Keeping 2026 is a desk-research report by Ivy Waters International. It compares official public guidance in ten reference jurisdictions: the United States as a state-led system, England, Scotland, Wales, Northern Ireland, Ireland, France, New Zealand, South Africa, and Ontario. It makes no original survey claims and does not estimate how many families keep records. Its central finding is that homeschool records have three distinct purposes: legal administration, learning reflection, and portability during transitions. The report recommends that families verify local requirements, keep legal documents separately, and maintain a concise annual packet containing a year card, learning map, evidence index, progress note, assessment page, and transition note. It also recommends data minimization for children's records. Ivy Waters is presented as a records-first tool that helps families organize evidence from real learning without claiming to replace government forms, official assessments, or receiving-institution decisions.

REPORT SECTION

References

Official government and public agency sources

- U.S. Department of Education: Non-Public Education FAQ
- National Center for Education Statistics: Homeschooling
- U.S. Department of Education: Missouri state regulation summary
- U.S. Department of Education: Colorado state regulation summary
- U.S. Department of Education: Florida state regulation summary
- GOV.UK: Educating your child at home
- GOV.UK: Elective home education guidance
- Scottish Government: Home education guidance
- Welsh Government: Elective home education guidance
- Education Authority Northern Ireland: Educating your child at home
- Ireland Department of Education: Home schooling
- Tusla: Home education registration
- France Service-Public: Instruction dans la famille
- New Zealand Ministry of Education: Home education
- South Africa Department of Basic Education: Home education
- Ontario: Policy/Program Memorandum 131
- UCAS: Uploading documents to your application
- Information Commissioner's Office: Data minimization

Clearly labeled advocacy and movement sources

- Home School Legal Defense Association: Legal resources
- National Home Education Research Institute

For the claim-by-claim source map, limitations, geography, source types, and verification date, see the Record-Keeping Source Ledger.

For a plain-language explanation of common record terms, see the homeschool glossary. Families comparing school-linked and independent pathways can also read umbrella school versus independent homeschooling. If administrative work is becoming part of the problem, homeschool burnout and the record-keeping load is a useful companion.

Ivy Waters International is a private school serving students from Pre-K through Grade 8. Based in Texas, where private schools are not accredited by the state, Ivy Waters International operates independently and intentionally maintains its own academic standards without external accreditation. We provide official school documentation, including enrollment letters, transcripts, and student portfolios. Parents are responsible for assigning grades based on their child's academic work and progress. Ivy Waters International serves students only through Grade 8 and currently does not issue high school diplomas. This article is general information, not legal or educational advice. Laws and agency guidance change, so verify current requirements with the relevant authority.