

# Western PA. home schoolers

A Network for Sharing Local Information about Homeschooling - Winter 1985 - Newsletter #11  
Editor: Susan Richman

Our Western PA Homeschooler's Network is three years old with this issue of our newsletter! Three years of growing from very simple beginnings to our present network of over 200 families encouraging and supporting each other. Many strong friendships have grown over these years, all of us feeling a special bond with others who've made the decision to teach their own children. We come from many different backgrounds, a wide spectrum of religious belief, formal educational backgrounds, job and life experiences, and our diversity is a great strength.

Those who've talked with me, or read this newsletter for a while, know I've always been very optimistic about the homeschooling climate in PA. I have always encouraged parents to seek cooperative agreements with their districts once their children are compulsory school age (age 8, if a child has never been enrolled in school). I've felt Section 1327 of the PA School Code gave us enough of an "in", enough of a right, and, after all, so many families have been able to work out fine agreements. My thinking has been changing now, and as you will see in upcoming pages of this issue, we are now urging all homeschooling parents to band together to seek a law change in PA. Partly my change of mind comes from the disheartening news of parents dealing with very difficult districts, partly from the new PSEA (NEA) motion to work to change section 1327 in their favor, and partly from the very good success so many other states have had in introducing and passing clear, positive new homeschooling legislation. Also, our network and numbers have grown significantly enough across the state that I feel we could truly make a good show of support for a change. We hope you will give a very serious reading to our draft proposal, and let us know what you think of it, and how you will be able to help in the work of the legislative campaign. - Susan Richman, Editor

## SCHOOLS DISTRICT COOPERATING WITH HOMESCHOOLING FAMILIES IN WESTERN PA:

ALIQUIPPA  
ALTOONA  
ARMSTRONG  
BEAVER  
CONNEAUT LAKE  
CRAWFORD CENTRAL  
CRESSON  
FAIRVIEW  
FOX CHAPEL  
HIGHLANDS  
KANE  
KISKI  
MILL CREEK  
MT. LEBANON  
MT. UNION  
NORTH ALLEGHENY  
NORTH HILLS  
PENN CREST  
PITTSBURGH  
QUAKER VALLEY  
REDBANK VALLEY  
SHALER  
SOUTH BUTLER  
SOUTH WEST BUTLER  
SLIPPERY ROCK  
TITUSVILLE  
TRINITY  
WEST JEFFERSON HILLS  
WOODLAND HILLS  
YOUGH

Some of these school districts have been exceptionally cooperative and even encouraging to families, while others are allowing families to homeschool only under very restrictive conditions that some families would find intolerable. Some districts have set up "Policies" modeled on a set of sample policies sent to them by Douglas Boelhouwer in Harrisburg, Dept. of ED. These policies often contain unnecessarily nasty language such as, "The school district will not grant 'credit' for courses completed at home and will neither 'promote', 'advance', nor 'graduate' students who complete a series of courses through in-home instruction" (this statement after they had enumerated VERY specific monitoring and evaluation and curriculum requirements-- as one parent said to me, what exactly is the point of all this close scrutiny if not to 'grant credit'?). Most have an arbitrary requirement of parent qualification (pass NTE Exam, be certified teacher, have college degree, etc.). It is almost a matter of "policy making by xerox machine", and these policies are becoming sort of a "common law" by being repeated so many times without thought. Indeed, when I've asked several superintendents what they meant by specific points in their "terms of agreement", they almost invariably mumble that, well, frankly they're not sure, but it was in the packet of policies they received in the mail. Some parents are finding that the superintendents behind these policies are sensible, and ready to be more cooperative than their copied policy seems to indicate. Others seem to think that once they've "formally adopted" a particular policy (that is, xeroxed someone else's and taped on their own letterhead), that it is carved in stone, inflexible, the LAW. It is important for parents to remember that there is NOTHING in the PA School Code that even remotely resembles these policies. Some superintendents come up with the argument that by law their own hired teachers must be certified, must submit weekly lesson plans or submit to frequent unannounced monitoring, use a proscribed curriculum, texts, and timetable, and so they are rightly just asking us to simply do the same thing as any other teacher in their district. Perhaps we need to now remind these superintendents that we are certainly NOT asking to be paid for our work with our own children, and that therefore such requirements and "logical" arguments cannot be made. To their great credit, at least one district, Conneaut Lake, invited all homeschooling families to an open work session of their school board, so that all could have a chance to speak and give their views on the proposed policy. After much parent input, the original very rigid policy has been amended to allow some leeway and flexibility.

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