

# WESTERN PA. HOME SCHOOLERS

A Network for sharing Local  
Information about Homeschooling

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Spring 1986 Newsletter (16)

Here's a quick run-down for new folks about how the present law works in PA right now (Note that it's not working very WELL in many places, which is why we're all working hard to change things with House Bill 1478... more on that on page 3).

First-- Compulsory school age in PA is only between ages 8 and 17. I often call this the best kept secret in PA education. This means that you DO NOT have to let any school officials know anything about your child before your child turns 8. No "truant officer" will come knocking to see why your child isn't in school if he is younger than 8. Some parents choose to notify the school superintendent of their homeschooling work before the child is 8, but this just a matter of being polite on the parents' part, showing goodwill, not a matter of necessity or law. Do note, though, that if your child has already been enrolled in school, then that entry age is his compulsory school age. Some districts even insist that kindergarten enrollment shifts the child's compulsory school age status (this is one point that the Brittons of West Mifflin, PA are fighting in their court case). Some districts are using the nasty tactic of telling parents that UNLESS they make a formal agreement with the district before the child turns 8, that the child will be considered a first grader if the parents decide to enroll him in school at age 8. One district went so far as to vote that ONLY children in kindergarten through 3rd grade were allowed to be homeschooled-- AND that parents of those young children had to be certified and go along with all sorts of evaluation procedures.

## SCHOOL DISTRICTS COOPERATING WITH HOMESCHOOLING FAMILIES IN WESTERN PA.

ALTOONA  
APOLLO-RIDGE  
ARMSTRONG  
BEAVER  
BETHEL PARK  
BUTLER  
CONNEAUT LAKE  
CRAWFORD CENTRAL  
CRESSON  
FAIRVIEW  
FOX CHAPEL  
FRANKLIN REGIONAL  
GIRARD  
HIGHLANDS  
JEFFERSON-MORGAN  
HOPEWELL

KANE  
KISKI  
LAKEVIEW  
LATROBE  
MILLCREEK  
MT. LEBANON  
MT. PLEASANT  
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NORTH HILLS  
PINE-RICHLAND  
PITTSBURGH  
QUAKER VALLEY  
REDBANK VALLEY  
RINGGOLD  
SHALER  
SOUTH BUTLER  
SOUTH WEST BUTLER  
SLIPPERY ROCK  
TRINITY  
WEST JEFFERSON HILLS  
YOUGH

Second-- As things currently stand, parents need to get approval from the local public school superintendent in order to legally teach their own child, once the child turns 8. As John Holt was so fond of saying, this is rather like having to ask General Motors for permission to buy a Toyota. The school people have a vested interest in having children attend the public schools, and often feel VERY uncomfortable having to come out and say it's OK for you to teach your kids yourself. Most districts have now come up with official policies, voted on by their school boards, that set the specific district guidelines for handling home-education requests. Don't flip out when you first see this "policy"--- I guarantee you it will seem full of all sorts of nasty language that seems totally uncalled for. Rest assured that your district, first of all, did NOT think this policy up on it's own, but have merely done a paste-up-xerox job with another district's home education policy. Often the school officials are as surprised as the parents to find what is really in the policy. The most important point in the district's policy is their statement on what qualifications the "private tutor" needs to have. Some few terrible districts insist that parents MUST be certified in every subject area that they will teach--- right down to Phys. Ed.--- and will take anyone to court who doesn't match that. Others say the parent must have a college degree, in any field. Others say two years of college. Others say a parent with a high school diploma is OK, if the child is enrolled in a "professionally prepared correspondence program". Others simply don't mention the area of tutor qualifications, but give indication that the superintendent can deny any request if he feels that the "intellectual, physical, emotional, and social needs of the child" are not being met by the proposed program. Some districts simply have more frequent evaluation requirements for parents that do not have "official" looking qualifications.

Do let us know what your school district's official policy is, and how strictly they enforce it. We keep copies of school district policies on file, and these often help new folks in knowing what to expect from a particular district, or even help families decide where to move to. Examples of the terrible, often ridiculous, disparity in district policies is good ammunition in trying to show legislators that a change needs to be made.

If any of you have had good experiences lately in securing approval for homeschooling, do write to share what the procedure was like. What was it like to meet a superintendent, what did you prepare in advance of the meeting, what requirements did they make that you felt were unreasonable-- or reasonable. (Two districts have made the very UNreasonable demand that the students MUST attend the public school for phys. ed. and music class). Lots of families will be approaching their districts this fall, and they will be helped by all the sharing you can do. Thanks! Susan Richman,

Western PA Homeschooler's masthead lettered  
by Jesse Richman, (8).

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