

PENNSYLVANIA HOME SCHOOLERS

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Victory in Education Committee

from Howard Richman

On Tuesday June 28th, HB 2501, the omnibus bill written by Rep. Ron Cowell, was passed out of the House Education Committee, with the committee members voting unanimously for our amendment to let parents teach special ed. children at home.

Dozens of homeschoolers, describing their own experiences with special education, and Hewitt Research had written letters to each member of the committee urging them to support the bill after changing the provision that prevented parents from teaching special ed. children. Hewitt Research included a magazine article describing a Supreme Court Case (Burlington vs. Massachusetts, 1985) which clearly stated that parents

can take their children out of a public school special ed. program at any time in order to enroll them in a private program. In addition to all of these splendid letters, homeschoolers in the districts of just about every member of the House Education Committee called their Representatives on the phone asking them to support the bill after changing the odious provision. If you were one of the people who contacted members of the House Education Committee, now is the time to write thank you letters.

As it turned out, we had three amendments to deal with, not just one. Two amendments were good, and one amendment, in its first form, was very bad. The good amendments were sponsored by Rep. Steve Freind and Rep. Ron Cowell, the bad one by Rep. John Davies. Freind's amendment permitted parents to teach special education children. Cowell's amendment required

superintendents to return our documentation after photocopying what they wanted for their files. Davies' amendment, in its first form, required parents to have their children take the TELLS test, if their superintendent so requested.

On June 21st, Jim, Tom and I headed to Harrisburg for what we thought would be the committee vote, but Rep. Cowell, during the night, had gone to the hospital with a kidney stone, and the meeting was canceled. However, the canceled meeting turned out to be a blessing. It gave us the chance to cement our ties with Rep. Freind and win over several other members of the committee including Rep. Burns and Rep. Battisto. Most importantly, at the end of that afternoon, Jim and I met with Rep. Davies, who was ready to compromise after receiving dozens of calls from his constituents objecting to his TELLS test amendment.

His amendment had originally stipulated that parents would have to give their children the TELLS test (a 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade reading and mathematics achievement test) if the superintendent required, and would have to send their children to a public school remediation class if the superintendent so directed.

Rep. Davies was ready to negotiate. He explained how his nephew had required remedial help when he returned to public school after being homeschooled on a sailboat in Florida. (His nephew is now a pilot for a major airline!) We explained that many parents would object to TELLS test remediation in a public school on religious grounds and that it would be a major disruption to send children for a remediation class during the homeschooling day. Jim and I listened carefully. Jim noticed that Rep. Davies only envisioned that the superintendents would require TELLS in cases where they didn't think the parents were educating their children. Rep. Davies accepted Jim's suggestion that TELLS just be required if ordered by the hearing officer in due process hearings after the superintendent had found that the parents are not educating their children. That hearing officer has the right to order the children into school, so the TELLS test, then, would be a life preserver which could allow parents to continue homeschooling legally. Furthermore, even in that situation,

SCHOOL DISTRICTS COOPERATING WITH HOMESCHOOLING FAMILIES IN PA

(NOTE: LOCAL POLICIES VARY WIDELY, BUT THESE DISTRICTS HAVE DEALT WITH HOMESCHOOLING-- YOU WON'T BE A FIRST CASE IN THESE DISTRICTS, ALTHOUGH WE ARE NOT SAYING APPROVAL WILL NECESSARILY BE EASY, FAIR, OR ASSURED. GUIDELINES SOME FAMILIES CAN LIVE WITH WILL BE INTOLERABLE TO OTHERS)

ABBINGTON
ALLENTOWN
ALTOONA
ANNVILLE-CLEONA
APOLLO-RIDGE
ARMSTRONG
BANGOR AREA
BEAVER
BETHEL PARK
BUTLER
CANTON AREA
CENTRAL DAUPHIN
CENTRAL
CHELTENHAM
CHESTER UPLAND
CENTRAL BUCKS
COMMODORE PERRY
CONEAUT LAKE
CRAWFORD
CRAWFORD CENTRAL
CRESSON
DALLASTOWN
DOWNTOWN AREA
EASTON
EAST LYCOMING
EAST PENN
EASTERN LEBANON CO
FAIRVIEW
FLEETWOOD
FOX CHAPEL
FRANKLIN REGIONAL
GIRARD

HAMPTON
HIGHLANDS
HOMER CENTER
HOPEWELL
INDIANA
JEFFERSON-MORGAN
JERSEY SHORE
KANE
KEYSTONE CENTRAL
KISKI
LAKEVIEW
LATROBE
MARPLE MEADOWTOWN
MCGUFFEY
MILLCREEK
MONTGOMERYVILLE
MT. LEBANON
MT. PLEASANT
MT. UNION
NORTHAMPTON AREA
NORTHEAST BRADFORD
NORTHEASTERN
NORTH HILLS
NORTH PENN
NORTH WESTERN
NORWIN
PARKLAND
PEN ARGYL AREA
PENN HILLS
PENN MANOR
PENNSBURG
PERKIOMEN VALLEY
PETERS TOWNSHIP

SAUCAN VALLEY
SHALER
SOLANCO
SOUTHERN (YORK CO.)
SOUTH WEST BUTLER
SOUTHERN TIOGA
SLIPPERY ROCK
SPRING COVE
SPRING GROVE
TAMAQUA
TREDYFFRIN-EASTTOWN
TRINITY
TROY
TYRONE AREA
UNIONVILLE-CHADDS FORD
WEST BRANCH
WEST CHESTER AREA
WEST JEFFERSON HILLS
WEST MIFFLIN
WEST PERRY
WILLIAMSPORT
WYALUSING
WYOMING VALLEY WEST
YORK
YOUGH
PHOENIXVILLE
PINE-RICHLAND
QUAKERTOWN COMMUNITY
QUAKER VALLEY
RED LION AREA
RIDLEY
RINGGOLD

PA Homeschoolers' Masthead
lettered by Jesse Richman (II)