

PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

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Some School Districts Trying to Impose Own Requirements

from Howard Richman

While there have been no prosecutions of homeschoolers under the new law, there have been several attempts by school districts to impose their own additional requirements such as home visits, special testing requirements, or quarterly progress reports.

While some parents have submitted to arbitrary requirements, other parents have refused. Sometimes they have called or written to Joseph Bard (Division of Advisory Services, PA Dept. of Education, 333 Market St., Harrisburg, PA 17126, 717-787-4860), and he has corrected the districts. In one case, just a mother mentioning to the school district that she would have to call the Department of Education made the school district call Joe Bard's office and resulted in the school district being much more conciliatory. On several occasions, the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA, P.O. Box 159, Paeonian Springs, VA 22129, 703-882-3838) has written letters for homeschoolers who

are members. When Joe Bard was on vacation in August, I found myself writing a few letters to school districts in which I quoted the law or the Department of Education's circular about the law, and politely explained to the school districts about how they were misinterpreting it.

No parents are being prosecuted for refusing to go along with an arbitrary school district policy. I doubt very much if a school district would ever take a homeschooler to court in order to enforce one of their made-up requirements. They would look very foolish if the homeschoolers subpoenaed someone from the Department of Education to testify. You don't need to be afraid of the school districts. If you comply with the law, there is nothing that the school districts can do to you.

On the other side of the ledger, we've been continuing to hear more good stories from homeschoolers in districts that prosecuted people under the old law. For example, Debbie Gillespie writes:

Great news! South Eastern School District is no longer hostile toward homeschoolers. The previous superintendent had even brought a law suit against one family. My oldest daughter turns eight this year and to be quite frank, I was scared to contact the new superintendent about our home school intentions.

But, Praise God! He sent me back a letter of acknowledgement, *thanking* me! for submitting papers that were in good order. He wished us good success, and even added a list of alternative tests we could use in lieu of the public schools! Then he proceeded to extend a welcome to contact his office if he could be of any service!

The story has been the same all over the state. All of the school districts have stopped prosecuting homeschoolers. ●

PA Homeschoolers Research Project

from Howard Richman

Jay Snyder, Bill Girtlen and I are doing a statistical study of home education in Pennsylvania. Our purpose is to replicate many aspects of a study that has already been conducted in the state of Washington by Jon Wartes and the Washington Homeschool Research Project. If we find the same results, our study will add credibility to their results which greatly favored everyone's right to homeschool.

Homeschooling champion Representative Joe Pitts has told us that studies like this can help us protect our law from people who oppose home education.

The study will utilize the test scores of the people who participated in the PA Homeschoolers fall testing program. At the test sites, people are given a questionnaire to fill in which is taken directly from the Washington questionnaire.

Strict confidentiality is kept. Tests and questionnaires are numbered. Bill Girtlen will get the numbered questionnaires and numbered achievement test results. He will not get

any information about names of parents or students. I will do the statistical analysis based upon a file prepared by Bill Girtlen which does not include any identifying numbers or names.

A report of the results of the study will be published in PA Homeschoolers. It may also be published in an educational journal or presented at an educational conference.

We are asking all evaluators, who are willing to help us, to collect the percentile scores on reading and mathematics achievement tests of all of the 3rd, 5th, and 8th grade students that they evaluate. These test scores will also be part of the study. They will provide a check on the representativeness of the fall testing sample, and they will enable a broader collection of achievement tests to measure how homeschoolers in Pennsylvania are doing.

If you are an evaluator who would like to participate in collecting this data, and didn't sign up at the evaluator's meeting, please let me know.

PEP to Retire

from Tom Eldredge

Howard Richman and I have decided to shut Parent Educators of Pennsylvania down as a name and an organization until it is needed for some future coalition formed to address a legislative crisis pressing enough to need action from all across the state. This has not been a hasty decision. After the bill passed, we had expected PEP to retire. Suddenly the Cottam case hit, and it seemed there may be a need to keep PEP alive if for no other reason than for good public relations. Therefore I, along with a few other leaders worked to develop what I thought would be a simple enough organization to meet the need. The second draft proposal was printed in issue #27 of PA Homeschoolers for comment and criticism. Until the second half of August, I received no criticism or comments concerning the reorganization proposal. Then I heard that some leaders in the western part of the state had big problems with the published purposes and many other things including the continued existence of PEP.

As a result of the letters and reports I heard from the western part of the state, I had prepared an eight page letter postponing the October 21 meeting until much more work and thought was put into

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"PA Homeschoolers" masthead hand lettered by Molly Richman-age 6.

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