

WESTERN PA. HOMESCHOOLERS

A Network for Sharing Local
Information about Home Schooling

Editors: Susan & Howard Richman

WINTER 1986

Newsletter 15

Notes from the Editor

Several very gratifying things from this past fall-- First the Home Education Rally and Press Conference held November 18, 1985, in Harrisburg was a great success. Families really turned out, and so many legislators were visited and informed about HB 1478, our Home Education Bill. A special thanks to everyone who was able to attend. More info on the Rally on page 3, and related legislative issues. We also hear that Rep. Gallagher's office has been "inundated" with letters about our bill.

Also good that there has been such good publicity about so many homeschooling families in Western PA. I send on thanks to all of you who have sent on copies of articles. We forward these to Rep. Pitts, the prime sponsor of our bill, HB 1478, as they can be a great help in getting the message out to representatives. Several papers have even had long series of articles about homeschooling, including the Franklin paper, and the Butler Eagle. Hope we see lots more articles this winter and spring.

Several families have even been on TV spreading the word about homeschooling. Barbara McMillan and Carol Trynovich were on TV-40 in December, and Rev. Bill and Cindy Britton and I were on PGH 2-Day on January 14. Interestingly, KDKA tried VERY hard to get someone on the CON side of the picture. After trying everywhere, they found Eileen DeWalt, who works as a parent recruiter for the PGH Public Schools Magnet Program. What a delightful surprise, as I'd met Eileen a few years back when SHE homeschooled her 11 year old son for one year!

Please note that we are COMPLETELY UPDATING the directory at the back of the newsletter. We'll only include those who let us know by next issue (late April) that they want to be included. Also hope you like the new format of the newsletter. I think the double columns will make it much more readable. Also do check your mailing label to see if your subscription has expired. Hope you renew, and that you feel you get a valuable service from our newsletter.

HAPPY HOMESCHOOLING! *Susan Richman*

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

Good to find that there ARE still SOME very cooperative school districts left in PA, even among the new districts that had never been approached about home education before. The Pine-Richland school district north of PGH even made an agreement with the Fullmers of Gibsonia that does not include mandatory standardized testing at this time. The Fullmers explained that they did not want testing while their son, age 8, was still a beginning reader. Hearing the Fullmers reasons, and reviewing their thorough educational plan, the superintendent readily agreed. Monitoring of their home education program will be done through showing a portfolio of work accomplished.

The Butler School District has just approved a home education policy, and it looks just like the Slippery Rock School District's policy. Most important point in it is that it clearly permits parents with a high school degree to teach their own children. Arbitrary definitions of "properly qualified" are usually the most difficult part of these policies to contend with.

The Girard School District is another new one. Most points of their official "policy" were waived when the Jeffreys approached them for permission. Again, it is important to remember that almost NO school district is actually sitting down and hashing out their own personal policy. Rather, they are just rushing to come up with SOMETHING and are usually just xeroxing whatever they can borrow from a neighboring district. Kim

Jeffrey said that her superintendent said several times during their meeting, "Hmm! What's that doing in the policy! Of course we don't really care about that!" A requirement that the home teacher have completed the "methods" courses in a college teacher training program was waived, as was yearly testing-- the superintendent felt testing should only be needed if the children were re-entered into the Girard Public Schools.

This is not to say that there still are not some VERY BAD districts out there. Harborcreek continues to prosecute the Thomases, West Mifflin refuses permission to the Brittons who both have college degrees, just because they are not CERTIFIED. General McLane School District has gone so far as to refuse permission to a family that had hired a certified private tutor, because the tutor would not be there the full 5 hours a day, 5 days a week (arguments about amount of time a tutor from the public school system visits a home-bound student had no sway with this superintendent). It is still, unfortunately, the luck of the draw-- some districts couldn't be nicer, some couldn't be worse. This is indeed the point we need to make again and again with our legislators-- some districts are working cooperatively with parents, giving them the support that gives confidence, while others are arbitrarily taking every parent to court who isn't qualified by their artificial standards. We clearly need our Home Education Bill to set things right.

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

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Editors: Susan & Howard Richman
R.D.2, Kittanning PA, 16201
phone: 412-783-6512.

HOUSE BILL 1478
from Howard Richman

BACKGROUND. House Bill 1478, the home education bill, got its start about a year and a half ago. Susan began to get phone calls from all across Pennsylvania from parents who were having trouble getting permission from District Superintendents to teach their own children. More and more, Superintendents were telling parents that unless they had teaching certificates or college diplomas they weren't properly qualified to teach their own children.

So Susan called Peter Bergson, editor of a home-schooling newsletter in Eastern Pennsylvania, who was getting the same sort of phone calls, and they decided to look into a change in the law. Both Susan and Peter went to visit their state representatives and both reps turned out to be supportive. We put together a draft of a bill which would still have home-schooling families go to the superintendent for permission to teach their own children, but would restrict the superintendent's ability to decline to give permission.

In the meantime Ann Cameron-Schick, of Pocono Area Homeschoolers, called a meeting which brought together home-schooling support group leaders from all across Pennsylvania. We all agreed that we would work together to support the draft that had already been submitted and we set up an organization called Parent Educators of Pennsylvania to coordinate our efforts in support of the bill.

Soon Tom Eldredge and others representing Parent Educators of Pennsylvania met with four Representatives who agreed to sponsor our bill but they didn't see why we wanted to keep having to get permission from the local school superintendent. They suggested that we redraft our bill by modeling it closely upon a Christian School bill (HB 877) that was likely to be passed this session. Tom redrafted our bill and committed home-schoolers to essentially teach the same subjects that the Christian Schools had agreed to teach. Our bill's sponsors felt that when HB 877 would pass, our bill would be voted on and get the same positive votes. Our bill requires parents who want to teach their own children to send a notarized affidavit to the Department of Education committing themselves to teaching specified subjects for 900 hours or 180 days. No longer would parents have to go on bended knee to superintendents to get permission to teach their own children.

In May, Tom Eldredge organized a legislative breakfast in Harrisburg. Many home-schooling families contacted their legislators, inviting them to come to the breakfast. At the breakfast Dr. Raymond Moore spoke to about fifty legislators and many home-schooling families. After the legislators left, the home-schooling families had a meeting at which we discussed possible amendments to our bill. Dr. Moore had mentioned that we should expect that evaluation measures would be added to the bill. The consensus of the families present was that we would permit evaluation measures so long as parents had a mixed bag of alternatives. We did not want to be trapped into allowing achievement test scores to decide matters.

In June our bill was introduced with 25 sponsors in the House of Representatives as House Bill 1478, and the bill was assigned to the House Education Committee for consideration.

In August, we had a meeting of support-group leaders and put together a draft of an evaluation amendment to our bill. The amendment that we drafted was designed to give parents a wide choice of ways to document that their child was being educated.

In September many more home-schooling families were not able to get permission from their district superintendents. Some of those families decided to contest the issue in court.

RECENT RALLY. On November 18th we had a press-conference and rally in Harrisburg to draw attention to the many home-schooling families in Pennsylvania who are being prosecuted under the present law. About 300 home-schoolers, parents and children, crowded into the Capitol Rotunda. Several home-schooling families who are being, or have been, prosecuted, presented their stories to the press. In this newsletter, you will find reprinted the statements prepared by those home-schooling families.

The rally was very successful in many ways, but did not get quite as much publicity as we had hoped. However, it did result in many legislators becoming aware of HB 1478 and calling Rep. Pitts, the chief sponsor, to find out about it, and the rally did result in Rep. Gallagher, Chairman of the House Education Committee, deciding to hold hearings on our bill. Still, we need to let the legislators know that many home-schooling parents are being prosecuted.

At the rally, Bill and Cindy Britton met with Rep. Gallagher and told him about their being prosecuted for teaching their children at home. Later at the rally, Jennifer Burke and Liselotte Visser were visiting with Senator Pecora. Sen. Pecora immediately called Rep. Gallagher's office and was told that the House Education Committee would hold hearings on the bill. On January 23rd, Rep. Gallagher directed Rep. Ruth Harper to Chair hearings on HB 1478. The time and place of the hearings has not yet been specified but it is likely they will not take place until late Spring or early Summer. These hearings mean that the House Education Committee is not planning to ignore the bill, but the slow pace of the House Education Committee with regard to the bill suggests that it won't be passed before school starts in September.

PROPOSED AMENDMENT. In recent months we have been getting much input from various sources on the wording of our proposed evaluation amendment. Especially helpful have been Attorney David Schwartz, and home-schooling parent Barbara McMillan.

We are currently seeking input from Representative Gallagher and home-schoolers across the state. The current draft of the amendment would give you three alternative ways to document that education is taking place: (1) results of an achievement test, (2) a written evaluation of educational progress by a psychologist or teacher, OR (3) a portfolio of your child's work including a daily journal. The decision about which form of documentation to use would be at your discretion. The superintendent could only request to see your documentation if he received a complaint from a named informant that education was not taking place in your home. Then, if the superintendent did not think the documentation was good enough he could make some suggestions and you would have a year to comply. If after a year, he still didn't think it was good enough, you could request a due process hearing in front of an impartial hearing officer to hear your case.