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PA Homeschoolers masthead hand
lettered by Jacob Richman, age 10.

A STATEWIDE NETWORK SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT HOME EDUCATION

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Good and Bad Year-End Experiences

from Howard Richman

The first full year of homeschooling in Pennsylvania under the new home education law has just ended, and we are starting to breathe a sigh of relief. All over the state, homeschoolers are having their documentation accepted by the school districts without challenge. Neither we, nor the Dept. of Education, have heard of a single case where a school superintendent has decided that a family wasn't giving a child an appropriate education.

If a superintendent was to challenge a family, first he would send the family a certified letter stating what part of the documentation was inadequate and asking for additional documentation. Then, after the parents turned in additional documentation, if the superintendent still did not think that the child was getting an appropriate education, the issue would be decided by an impartial person at a due process hearing which would cost the school district several thousand dollars. Last year, there was one such hearing which was decided in favor of the homeschooling family.

Even though all of the documentation has been accepted, not every family has had a pleasant year-end experience. Two families, one in Greene County the other in Somerset County, were yelled at by their superintendents. Both of these superintendents wanted to make requirements which were not in the law. The Greene County superintendent wanted home visits and the Somerset County Superintendent wanted parents to use the public school curriculum.

All through this school year, families have been confronted with districts that made-up requirements that are not part of the law. Sometimes, the families have

submitted to these requirements, and at other times the families have stood their ground. Some families simply showed the districts the home education law (available from us if you send a self-addressed envelope), or asked the districts to call Dr. Miller at the Dept. of Education (717-787-4860). Except for the Pittsburgh Public Schools, all of the school districts backed down if the parents stood their ground. The superintendent of the Pittsburgh Public Schools is being sued for \$400,000 by the Home School Legal Defense Association because he did not back down on his request to have homeschooled children take the "MAP" tests which are part of the Pittsburgh Public School Curriculum but not required under the home education law. This case still has not been heard, but a hearing is scheduled for August.

Here are some excerpts from letters which we have received from all over the state that describe year-end experiences with evaluators and school districts. Most of these letters describe positive experiences just as most of the experiences people have had across the state have been positive.

Positive Experience

from Faith Irvine

I was just reflecting on my interview with our superintendent yesterday and thought I would write to share a pleasant experience. We live in the Woodland Hills School District just outside of Pittsburgh. This is our first year homeschooling our nine year old son, who was in third grade. I was slightly nervous about this interview, because some of us had felt that "this Dr. McGuire was out to get us." On the contrary she was a very nice woman who has a job to do and wants to do it right.

She had a form to fill out which was nothing more than a simple checklist. She asked me for each item as she came to it, made a check on her list, and maybe a brief comment. She glanced very briefly through Jeromy's portfolio, which we kept in a 1 1/2" three ring binder. She thanked me for bringing "all of this in," as though it were a great deal. All she did with my log was to look at the first page and write down the subjects and how many days a week each was covered.

There were a few things which seemed to impress her. First, I kept a one page calendar of the year in the front of my log and circled each date that we had "a day of school." She liked being able to see 180 days at a brief glance. Another thing she liked was that I put letter grades on some of Jeromy's papers. I did this mainly for my evaluator, who wanted to see grades. As I used a very

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Test Scores

from Howard Richman

In the next issue we will have a complete report of how homeschoolers scored on various tests given last school year. Here is a quick preview. The average reading score for the 171 homeschooled children on last fall's CTBS/4 achievement tests given by PA Homeschoolers was the 77th percentile and the average math score was the 66th percentile. These scores mean that homeschoolers in general scored way above average on this achievement test.

The Department of Education has collected the TELLS test scores for 278 home educated children. Homeschoolers in general scored just above the state average in reading and just below the state average in math. ●