

PENNSYLVANIA

HOMESCHOOLERS

A Statewide Network for Sharing Information about Home Education

Editors: SUSAN & HOWARD RICHMAN, SUMMER 1992, ISSUE #40

PA Recognizes Homeschool Diplomas!

from Howard Richman

Pennsylvania just became the first state, to my knowledge, where you can graduate from high school as a homeschooler and have your diploma recognized when you apply for state-scholarship grants to college.

Letter from Dept. of Ed.

On June 11, 1992, Joseph Bard, Commissioner for Elementary and Secondary Education at the Pennsylvania Department of Education, wrote a letter to the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency (PHEAA), the state agency that oversees scholarship grants and loans. Mr. Bard wrote:

The question of eligibility for PHEAA grants and loans by Pennsylvania students receiving their education through Home Education Programs has been posed by Dr. Howard B. Richman, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers.

Home Education in Pennsylvania is addressed in Section 1327.1 (Act 169 of 1988) of the Public School Code of 1949. The code prescribes attendance and curriculum requirements that mirror those of the public school system. In addition, the code requires the program supervisor to maintain specific documentation to demonstrate that appropriate education is occurring. This documentation is annually submitted to the superintendent of the public school district of residence

as monitor of the program.

Dr. Richman, founder of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers organization, has furnished the Department of Education the standards and procedures established by the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers for evaluation of a home education student's education portfolio. The Department has been asked to review those standards and procedures to render an opinion as to the acceptability of these student's credentials for PHEAA grants and loans.

We have reviewed the standards and procedures of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency and find them acceptable, therefore, I request PHEAA consider any student receiving a diploma from the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency as eligible for a PHEAA grant and loan.

Response from PHEAA

In order to understand PHEAA's response, it is necessary to understand the law that PHEAA works under. For PHEAA to give a scholarship grant to a student, Pennsylvania law requires that the student must have a diploma which, in the opinion of the PA Department of Education, is the equivalent of a Pennsylvania public school diploma. PHEAA and the Department of Education have interpreted this language to include all students who are graduates of non-public schools in Pennsylvania, as

well as students who are graduates of foreign high schools. However, graduates of correspondence schools or private tutoring must first pass the GED before the Department of Education deems them to have the equivalent of a high school diploma.

In his reply, Gary Smith at PHEAA responded to Joseph Bard. He wrote:

Specifically, at issue is the provision in the State Grant statute that requires the Department to make a determination whether a school "...provides a course of instruction...and maintains standards of instruction substantially equivalent to those of the public high schools located in the Commonwealth."

Your letter indicates that the Pennsylvania Department of Education has reviewed the standards and procedures of the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency and finds them acceptable. Therefore, effective with the 1992-93 academic year the Agency will now accept a Pennsylvania Homeschoolers diploma as satisfaction of the Agency's high school graduation test for State Grant purposes.

PA Compared to Other States

The reason for Pennsylvania's leadership is because our homeschool law specifies requirements for high school graduation from a home education program. Unfortunately for

homeschoolers in other states, their laws do not have such requirements. The situation is getting so bad in other states that the National Center for Home Education wrote, in the March-April 1992 Court Report, that some home school graduates are being denied admission to college because the colleges are worried about jeopardizing their standing with government-run scholarship grant programs. The National Center for Home Education recommended that college bound homeschooled students take the GED. This will not be necessary for Pennsylvania graduates who receive a *PA Homeschoolers* diploma.

The first *Pennsylvania Homeschoolers* graduate to receive a scholarship grant through PHEAA was Julie Rearick from Armstrong County. Julie was accepted to her first choice, an expensive private college, but knew she could not afford to attend unless she obtained a PHEAA grant. To take the GED, she would have to sign that she was a drop-out which would immediately cause her to lose the social security that she had been receiving since her father died. But when the *PA Homeschoolers* diploma was recognized by PHEAA, she received a substantial scholarship grant which will enable her to go to the college of her choice without losing social security in the meantime.

There is only one other state, to my knowledge, which is working on provisions for high school graduation from home education programs. In North Dakota the school districts will determine whether or not they will accept or reject high school credits of home-based students. The Home School Legal Defense Association is working on a legal challenge to this procedure because it will result in different graduation requirements and credit standards in each district. Our experience in Pennsylvania is that school districts have a very limited view of what deserves course credit. They expect homeschoolers to pass all of the tests that are given to students who take the same course in their schools.

In Pennsylvania, instead of the school districts setting up standards and awarding credits, the homeschool organizations set up standards and

procedures for awarding credits to homeschooled students. So far, *PA Homeschoolers* is the only organization doing so. We award credits through evaluators chosen by parents to do their year-end portfolio evaluations as required by PA law. These evaluators only need to use our standards when filling out our transcript forms. Over 18 evaluators who have agreed to award *PA Homeschoolers* credits are listed in the *Qualified Evaluators* listing of this newsletter.

When I designed the initial standards for awarding credits to homeschoolers for the *PA Homeschoolers* diploma, I tried to make them flexible enough so that homeschoolers could teach according to their own style, yet strong enough so that all of our graduates would be well read and would be able to communicate well in speech and writing. The initial standards for the *PA Homeschoolers* diploma can be changed through a 3/4ths vote of the members of the accreditation agency using a ballot which is included in the summer issue of the newsletter. (See page 3 for this year's ballot.)

Other Home School Organizations

In the future I expect other home-school organizations to enter the picture. The Erie Homeschoolers are planning to submit standards and procedures to the Department of Education in the near future. A copy of our "standards and procedures" as submitted to the Department of Education is available to anyone planning to initiate a diploma program through their own homeschool organization. The standards statement that I submitted to the Department of Education was directly taken from our booklet, *Guide to PA Homeschoolers Diploma*.

Thank You

I would like to extend my sincerest thank you to the many people who helped achieve this wonderful victory for home educated students in Pennsylvania. I would like to invite you to offer your own thanks in letters and prayer.

First, I would like to thank Representative Joseph R. Pitts (905 Mitchell Farm Lane, Kennett Square PA

19348) who originally wrote the graduation requirements into our homeschool bill back in June 1985. We did not, at that time, realize that requirements could be good things, but he did.

Second, I would like to thank Representative Ronald R. Cowell (1601 Penn Ave. #606, Pittsburgh PA 15221), chairman of the House Education Committee and a board member of PHEAA, both for keeping the graduation requirements in our homeschool bill back in November 1988, over the objections of the Department of Education, and for interceding with PHEAA administrators and Joseph Bard this year to get recognition of homeschoolers' diplomas.

Third, I would like to thank Commissioner Joseph F. Bard (PA Department of Education, 333 Market St., Harrisburg PA 17126) for having the courage to make this decision.

Fourth, I would like to thank Representative David R. Wright (21 North Sixth Ave., Clarion PA 16214), Chairman of PHEAA, for his support behind the scenes.

Fifth, I would like to thank the many homeschooling parents who helped me with my letters on this issue to the Department of Education over the past 3½ years, who came with me to meetings with state representatives, and who trusted me to negotiate on their behalf.

Last, I would like to thank God who has somehow guided us stumblers to this success.

HB 1695 is Dead!

from Howard Richman
House Bill 1695, the PA bill that would lower the compulsory school age from 8 to 6 and raise it at the other end from 17 to 18 is dying in the Appropriations Committee according to state representatives and their staff people. They say that it is too controversial to be voted on during an election year. It is not yet clear whether it will be brought up again in 1993. If it is, we will have to resume our efforts to educate our legislators about it next year. In the meantime, our lobbying efforts against it paid off! The thanks of all homeschoolers go to those who lobbied in Harrisburg, and visited, wrote to, or called their legislators.