

Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Newsletter



A Statewide Network for Sharing Information about Home Education Editors: Howard & Susan Richman

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Age 8 Circular Withdrawn

from Howard Richman

On October 30, 1995, just before we went to press with our last issue, the PA Department of Education issued a Basic Education Circular (BEC #8-95) to school districts on the subject of "Age Limits for School Attendance." This BEC would have slightly lowered the effective compulsory school age and would have caused much friction between school districts and homeschooling families. This circular sent our Liaison Committee (formed during the meeting after our September 21 legislative breakfast) into high gear. We wrote a letter to Greg White, Policy Director for the Ridge Administration at the Department of Education, and he took all of the bad parts out of the Circular. A replacement circular minus all of the language dealing with age 8 students (BEC #17-95) was sent out to school districts in December. Praise the Lord!

Background

After our September 19 legislative breakfast we had a meeting of the 263 homeschoolers who had attended, to discuss problems that were occurring under Pennsylvania's home education law. We decided that the problems that were occurring were too small to warrant opening up our homeschool law at this time, and instead we formed two committees. One was formed to encourage local support groups to work with districts who try to exceed their authority and one to work with the Pennsylvania Department of Education to try to encourage them to

keep school districts from going beyond the law.

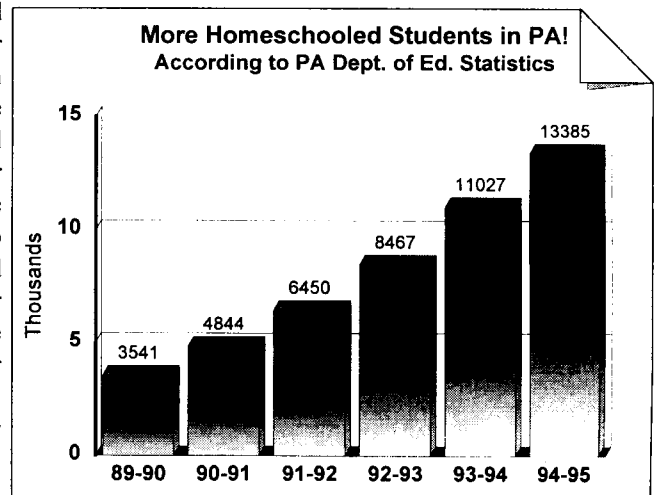
Our Liaison Committee was formed in response to the marked deterioration in the School Services Office at the Department of Education (the office which answers homeschooling questions). In the past homeschoolers could call them whenever their districts were trying to exceed their authority and the office personnel would intervene with the districts. But more and more, that office was declining to intervene. It almost seemed like they were encouraging friction between parents and districts. The October 30th Basic Education Circular was an example of just how far that office had deteriorated. It would have had all of the following negative affects:

1. **It Slightly Lowered Compulsory School Age.** Previously the Department of Education held that a student turning eight during the school year did not have to enter school or file a home education program affidavit until the beginning of the next school semester. This circular would have changed the Department's position to one where students would have to enter school or their parents file a home education affidavit by their 8th birthday.

2. **It Placed New Entrants in First Grade.**

Previously if a child above age 6 would enter school, the student would be placed by the school at a grade level appropriate to his or her ability. This BEC would substitute a bureaucratic mandate that students entering school at age 8 be placed in first grade. (Thus an 8-year-old child working at a third grade level would have been sentenced to two years of wasted time.)

3. **It Urged School Districts to Contact Parents of Seven-Year-Olds.** Although there was no basis for such action in law or regulation, the BEC would urge school districts to contact parents to enroll their children at age 7. Specifically it urged districts to "notify parents of children who are not yet enrolled and are seven years old of the... [school] code and the school district calendar... [and] encourage, not require, a parent to enroll their soon to be eight year old child." We



anticipated that such contacts would be perceived by homeschoolers as attempts to intimidate them.

In Issue #53 of the PA Homeschoolers we gave the phone number of the Office of School Services (717-787-4860) which people could call to obtain a copy of the BEC and invited them to call someone on our Liaison Committee to ask for an update on the current situation and action plan.

To respond to this BEC, our Liaison committee met together by conference call on November 12 and came up with a plan of action. Our first step was to bring this BEC and its problems to the attention of Gov. Ridge's people who now lead the PA Dept. of Education. We hoped that the BEC was issued by career bureaucrats without the Ridge Administration being aware of its implications. During the meeting we edited and decided to send (and FAX) a letter that I had written to Greg White at the Department of Education. We also approved a letter which Dee Black (HSLDA) had written and was prepared to send to Mary Ann Nobers at the Department.

Our letter received a quick response. A few days later we received a phone reply that Greg White had assigned one of his assistants to look into the matter and by the end of November he called to say that all of the parts of the BEC which we objected to would be withdrawn.

Then in December, the Department of Education issued a revised BEC replacing the bad one, and eliminating all of the language referring to age 8. The revised circular just includes innocuous language about school district's responsibilities regarding students who were 21 years-old or over.

Our Thanks to Ridge Administration

I am sure that the School Services Office at the Department of Education took note that homeschoolers have friends among the Ridge Administration people who head their Department. It is likely that we will see a continuing improvement in relations between that office and the homeschooling community for the remaining years of the Ridge Administration.

If, in the future, your school district tries to exceed the law with their requirements, please write a letter to the

PA Department of Education (School Services Office, Department of Education, 333 Market St, Harrisburg PA 17126-0333). If you do not get a satisfactory reply from the Department, please send your letter and that reply to us and we will take them up with Greg White.

You may wish to take the time now to thank Secretary Hickok and Greg White for removing the parts of BEC 8-95 which would have negatively affected homeschoolers. Their addresses are:

Eugene W. Hickok, Secretary
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

Greg White, Policy Director
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
Department of Education
333 Market Street
Harrisburg, PA 17126-0333

PHAA Incorporates

from Howard Richman

On January 1, 1996, the Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency incorporated as a non-profit corporation. The Board of Directors approved the Bylaws and elected officers. The officers are:

Executive Director: Howard Richman

Secretary: Debra Newell

Treasurer: Karen Boyd.

Anyone who wants a copy of the bylaws can find them at our Internet site (www.penn.com/~pahome) or can send us a self addressed stamped envelope.

The new bylaws give membership privileges to those who were members of the unincorporated association (the homeschooling supervisors who have students in the program and the evaluators listed with a "P" in this newsletter). Also a new class of members was established — "Alumni members" — for both parents who have supervised our

graduates as well as for our graduates themselves.

The only major change made by the bylaws has to do with alumni members. (We worried that having to notify all alumni of our annual membership meeting could break the bank if we didn't ask alumni to pay their way.) Those alumni who want to keep their membership current (so that they will be notified of the annual meeting and can vote) will have to pay a yearly \$5 membership fee. They will receive an alumni newsletter which will go out once a year.

Navy Opening to Homeschoolers

from Howard Richman

An out-of-court settlement reached by the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) promises to open the Navy to homeschool graduates on the same basis as traditional school graduates.

While homeschoolers have been able to enlist in the military (for example PA Homeschoolers graduates are currently in the Army, Air Force, and National Guard) those who do so have faced discrimination in their initial choice of military specialties and in their opportunities for certain enlistment incentives such as college loan reimbursements.

According to David Gordon, staff attorney, the HSLDA recently reached an *Agreement in Principle* with the Secretary of Defense arising out of one of their court cases. The Navy has agreed that until the end of 1998, it will open the Navy to homeschoolers admitting them on basically the same terms as traditional high schoolers. At the end of that time, all of the homeschoolers admitted will be tracked for attrition-rate purposes. If their attrition rates are comparable to traditional high schoolers that information will be given to the Department of Defense for use in a revision of enlistment policy which would affect all the military services. This agreement will probably be signed by an attorney representing the Secretary of Defense and go into effect before the end of March (1996).

Until the end of 1998, the Navy will be the only military service that stops discriminating against homeschoolers. After that (if homeschoolers who enter the Navy stick) all of the military services will probably stop discriminating. So, if you have a student who is interested in military enlistment before the end of 1998, urge them to consider the Navy.