

GUIDE TO PA HOMESCHOOL LAW

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How the Law Came to Be

“The President of the Senate said, ‘Sen. Loeper moves that the Senate will concur on the amendments placed by the House in Senate Bill 154. On the motion ... the Clerk will call the roll.’

Clerk: Afflerbach.

Sen. Afflerbach: Aye.

President: Are there negative votes? Are there negative votes on the motion to concur with the House amendments? The clerk will now proceed with the roll call. ... The vote of concurrence is ayes 49, nays 0, the majority having voted in the affirmative. The amendments are concurred with and the House shall certify.

Gallery [seats up in a balcony which look down on the senate floor]: One second pause, and then applause. It took us a second to realize what had just happened.

Sen. Loeper: We have with us a group of Parent Educators of Pennsylvania, parent educators from all across Pennsylvania. We have sixty plus in the gallery, and we’d like to welcome you to the gallery, and we’re glad you enjoyed your legislative success.

At this point the homeschoolers who were filling the gallery stood up and applauded. The senators, several at first, and then all of them, stood facing the gallery, and applauded us.

A few minutes later Don Wolf, a reporter, told Bob Finley, ‘I have covered the capitol for a long time, but I have never before seen the senators give a standing ovation to the gallery!’”

-From “Story of a Bill”, by Howard Richman

And so our homeschooling law finally passed in the Senate in October 1988, after four and a half strenuous years of lobbying-- years begun with the premature hopes that our legislative effort would be quick and simple.

Before the law passed, Pennsylvania prosecuted more homeschoolers than any other state. School district superintendents decided whether or not to allow homeschooling in their school districts, and many did not.

After 1988, prosecution of homeschoolers almost completely stopped. Homeschoolers set their own objectives, kept portfolios, and arranged for end of year evaluations of their programs, often by former-teachers who were also homeschooling parents. Superintendents could challenge the evaluators’ determinations, but rarely did.

In November 2005, Senate Bill 361 gave homeschoolers access to public school sports and other extra-curricular activities on the same basis as public school students.

In October 2014, House Bill 1013 removed the power of the school superintendents to challenge the evaluators’ determinations and recognized diplomas awarded by parents, while continuing to recognize the diplomas awarded by homeschool diploma organizations.

The homeschool law has changed over time, but it has remained a law in which parents can homeschool so long as a teacher or former teacher agrees that they are giving their children an appropriate education.

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1. Filing Your Affidavit

A notarized affidavit of the parent or guardian or other person having legal custody of the child or children, filed prior to the commencement of the home education program and annually thereafter on August 1 with the superintendent of the school district of residence and which sets forth: the name of the supervisor of the home education program who shall be responsible for the provision of instruction; the name and age of each child who shall participate in the home education program; the address and telephone number of the home education program site; that such subjects as required by law are offered in the English language, including an outline of proposed education objectives by subject area; evidence that the child has been immunized in accordance with the provisions of section 1303(a) and has received the health and medical services required for students of the child's age or grade level in Article XIV; and that the home education program shall comply with the provisions of this section and that the notarized affidavit shall be satisfactory evidence thereof.... The affidavit shall contain a certification to be signed by the supervisor that the supervisor, all adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children in a home education program have not been convicted of the criminal offenses enumerated in subsection (e) of section 111 within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit. — Act 169 of 1988

The day after you file your affidavit you can begin homeschooling legally in Pennsylvania. You can file your first affidavit at any time, but after that you must file a new affidavit each year by August 1. There is an affidavit that you can print out and use on pages 5 and 6 of this guide. Also, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has two sample affidavits on their website:

- [One is for students in grades 1-6](#)
- [The other is for students in grades 7-12](#)

Most people send their affidavits to the local superintendent by certified mail. The return receipt from the post office proves that the superintendent received the affidavit. Other people take the affidavit to the school district and get a receipt in person from the school superintendent's secretary.

1.1 Who Must File

You do not need to file an affidavit for any child who has not yet reached the

compulsory attendance age. In Pennsylvania, this means that you do not have to file for children who are under 6 unless that child has already attended school in first grade or above, or you have filed for the child in the past. (Kindergarten does not count as school attendance.)

1.2 How to File

1. **Notarize Affidavit.** Fill out the affidavit form and get it notarized. You can photocopy and fill out the two page affidavit form included on the next pages.

2. **Recommended but not Required.** Include the children's grade level on the part of the form that requires the child's name and age if you are indeed sure of their grade level. Some districts may appreciate at least a brief note from the parent noting that an 8 year old who is filed as a third grader has already completed 2nd grade work at home.

3. **Objectives.** Make a list of objectives for each child by subject area. Be sure to include *at least* one objective for each required subject. Your list of objectives may not be rejected by the school district so long as you list at least one objective for each required subject. Attach the list with a staple or a paper clip to the notarized affidavit. See Chapter 2 for help with writing your objectives.

4. **Immunizations.** Each time you file an affidavit, you must attach evidence that your child has been immunized against:

- chickenpox (2 doses)
- diphtheria, tetanus & pertussis (4 doses)
- hepatitis B (3 doses)
- measles, mumps and rubella (2 doses)
- polio (4 doses)

Also, additional vaccines are required for entry into 7th grade:

- tetanus, diphtheria and pertussis
- meningococcal vaccine

Also for entry into 12th grade, students need another dose of meningococcal vaccine. (A dose received at 16 years of age or older will count as the 12th grade dose.)

[Note: if your child has had chicken pox, you do not have to vaccinate for chicken pox if you include a statement that your child has already had the disease.]

Title 28 section 23.82 of the Pennsylvania Code describes a number of alternative ways to present immunization records:

Any written document showing the date of immunization — that is, baby book, Health Passport,

family Bible, other states official immunization documents, International Health Certificate, immigration records, physician record, school health records, and other similar documents or history.

For example, the *Private Physician's Report* form included at the end of Chapter 8 could be attached.

Some parents whose children have already been in school will attach a note: "Immunization records were presented to the XYZ School District when the child attended Kindergarten at ABC Elementary School." People who have already filed one home education affidavit with the school district will sometimes attach a note: "Immunization records were presented with the initial home education affidavit filed in 1997."

If you do not believe in immunizations, just simply attach a statement in writing signed by you, the parent or guardian, saying that you object to such immunization. Title 28 section 23.84 of the Pennsylvania Code specifies this religious exemption:

Children need not be immunized if the parent, guardian, or emancipated child objects in writing to the immunization on religious grounds or on the basis of a strong moral or ethical conviction similar to a religious belief.

If your child is deemed to have a medical problem which may contraindicate immunization, get a physician to write a note saying that immunization might be detrimental to the health of your child, and attach that note to your affidavit.

5. **Medical Checkups.** You have sworn in your affidavit that a Comprehensive Health Record is being kept for your child. This means that either you or a school nurse has a file folder where the health records (for the requirements described in Chapter 8) are kept.

In addition, many school superintendents interpret the language of the law to mean that you need to attach evidence to your affidavit that you have been complying with the health and medical services requirements. This may one day be tested in court. In order to avoid a problem we recommend that you attach to your affidavit receipts from dentists or doctors, filled-in copies of the medical or dental forms included in Chapter 8, or even

a note saying that you have scheduled an appointment with a doctor, dentist, or school nurse. The PA Department of Education has confirmed that districts do have the right to see this sort of evidence, although HSLDA contests this.

6. **Optional.** Attach a written request that the school district lend you text books, planned courses, and/or other materials. Then, call the school district and set up an appointment where you could pick up those materials. The school districts *must* lend you materials if you request them. Since the school districts are *lending* you materials, not *giving* them to you, you must return them when you are done with them.

This means that they do not have to give you paper, workbooks, or other consumable materials which you would not return. Very few districts will have any extra teacher guide materials to lend, as they only purchase enough for their own teachers.

7. **Handicapped Children.** Parents whose children have been classified as handicapped (special education other than gifted) must include a letter with their affidavit from a special education teacher or a psychologist. See details in Chapter 3.

If you *want* your handicapped child to participate in a school's special education program, attach a written request that your

child be permitted to participate in the school district's or local intermediate unit's special education program. If you and the school district or intermediate unit can work it out, your child can participate at a public school or a private school licensed to provide special education services.

9. **Send by Certified Mail.** Mail the affidavit to the school district by certified mail return receipt requested. You probably won't hear anything back from the school district. Your receipt from the post office is evidence that they received it.

10. **Keep a Copy.** Make a photocopy of everything to keep for your records.

AFFIDAVIT OF THE SUPERVISOR OF A HOME EDUCATION PROGRAM

The compulsory education section of the Pennsylvania school code states:

It is the policy of the Commonwealth to preserve the primary right of the parent or parents, or person or persons in loco parentis to a child, to choose the education and training for such child.

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA)

) SS:

COUNTY OF _____)

Before me the undersigned notary public, this day personally appeared

_____, being first duly sworn on oath, deposes and says:

I attest that I am a parent or guardian or other person having legal custody of the child or children listed below, that I am responsible for the provision of instruction in his/her/their home education program in which the following courses are offered in the English language for a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction or a minimum of nine hundred (900) hours of instruction at the elementary school level or nine hundred ninety (990) hours of instruction at the secondary school level, and that the home education program is otherwise in compliance with the provisions of the Public School Code:

At the ELEMENTARY SCHOOL LEVEL the following courses shall be taught: English, to include spelling, reading, and writing; arithmetic; science; geography; history of the United States and Pennsylvania; civics; safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires; health and physiology; physical education; music; and art.

At the SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL the following courses shall be taught: English, to include language, literature, speech and composition; science; geography; social studies, to include civics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania; mathematics, to include general mathematics, algebra, and geometry; art; music; physical education; health; and safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires. Other courses may be included at the discretion of the supervisor.

I also attest that each child in the home education program has received the health and medical services required by Article XIV of the Public School Code and that a comprehensive health record is being maintained for each child. I also attest that I have a high school diploma or its equivalent, and that all adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children in the home education program have not been convicted, within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit, of the criminal offenses enumerated in subsection (E) of section 111 of the school code. These offenses relate to criminal homicide, aggravated assault, kidnapping, unlawful restraint, rape, statutory rape, involuntary deviate sexual intercourse, indecent assault, indecent exposure, concealing a death of child born out of wedlock, endangering welfare of children, dealing in infant children, corruption of minors, and sexual abuse of children. They also include felony offenses relating to prostitution and related offenses, and felony offenses relating to obscene and other sexual materials.

Attached is:

1. An outline of proposed education objectives by subject area.
2. Evidence that each child has been immunized or has a religious or medical exemption from immunizations.
3. Evidence of supervisor's graduation from High School or College or attainment of a General Equivalency Diploma (GED).
4. If a child in the home education program has been identified pursuant to the provisions of the education of the handicapped act as needing special education services, excluding those students identified as gifted or talented, then also attached is written notification of approval from a Pennsylvania-certified special education teacher, or a licensed clinical psychologist, or a certified school psychologist that this program addresses the specific needs of the student.

Name of Supervisor of Home Education Program _____

Address of Home Education Program Site _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ County _____

Phone Number of Home Education Program Site _____

Name and Age of Each Child who shall Participate in the Program:

Signature _____

Subscribed and sworn before me this day _____ date

NOTARIZATION:

Notary Public

File with Superintendent
School District of Residence
prior to commencement of the
Home Education Program and
annually thereafter on August 1st.

2. Resources for Writing Objectives

[The affidavit includes] an outline of proposed education objectives by subject area. . . . The required outline of proposed education objectives shall not be utilized by the superintendent in determining if the home education program is out of compliance with this section and section 1327. — Act 169 of 1988

When you file your notarized affidavit, you must attach a list of objectives that you plan to meet over the year. Your list must be arranged by subject area. Your affidavit cannot be rejected because of perceived inadequacies as long as you have covered every subject. In other words, you are not seeking approval of your particular program, but rather letting officials know that you do indeed have plans and directions. Many parents would want to include goal statements about their religious beliefs as they affect particular subject areas, and this is certainly fine, although not required. The local superintendent cannot try in any way to make you exclude religious education.

The sample affidavit included at the end of Chapter 1 lists the required subject areas for elementary students (grades 1 through 6) and secondary students (grades 7 through 12). It is clear from the practice of secondary schools that not all subjects are expected every year. For example, algebra is usually taught one year while geometry is taught another. Since only three years of mathematics is required for graduation from a home education program, it is clear that mathematics only need be taught for three of the four high school years. Elementary schools usually teach each required subject every year, except for PA History which is customarily taught in the 4th grade. Parents who use a correspondence school curriculum with elementary school students will often have to supplement the “scope and sequence” with objectives for art, music, physical education, Pennsylvania history, fire safety, or other areas which are required by Pennsylvania law, but not provided in the curriculum.

Some parents get objectives directly from the materials that they plan to use. They take chapter titles, and turn them into objectives and study topics.

Some parents negotiate the written objectives with their children so that the objectives become goals that the children will work toward. For example, when Tom and Madalene Murphy wanted to study American history with their son Christian, they asked him what parts of American

history he wanted to concentrate on. Christian was fascinated by automobiles and machines, especially the Stanley Steamer. So the written objective was, “Christian will increase his knowledge of American history, particularly the period during which the Stanley Steamer was popular.” This objective allowed the family to plan activities like reading books about the Stanley brothers and about Theodore Roosevelt and to take advantage of events like a TV biography of Theodore Roosevelt and a local museum fair that just happened to include a 1915 Stanley Steamer.

Some parents do not list specific texts or source materials with their objectives—that will come after the fact in your portfolio. Objectives can be written in a broad and general enough way to encompass many possible materials.

The remainder of this section includes lists of objectives that you might want to adapt when you put together your own objectives. Don’t feel that you have to reinvent the educational wheel here; feel free to borrow when appropriate.

2.1 Susan Richman’s Objectives

If you write your objectives in a broad enough way, they will give you the flexibility to jump wholeheartedly into unplanned projects during the year. Here are a sampling of some of the more flexible objectives that Susan included in her list of objectives for our son Jesse in various years:

MATH

—Jesse will use problem solving mathematics skills in daily life applications — when building, estimating distance, using money, counting and classifying, map reading, solving “found” word problems in newspaper articles, using calculator when helping at our sales table at conferences, etc.

ENGLISH

—Jesse will focus on an author of choice and read several works by that author, comparing how the works are similar or different, how the author changed his approach or developed a consistent style.

GEOGRAPHY

—Jesse will continue to utilize map reading when we are on family trips, demonstrating use of scale, highway codes, direction, and understanding of how land formations dictate where roadways can be located.

SOCIAL STUDIES

—Jesse will be involved in choosing a series of independent study topics in the

Social Studies this year, developing his research skills and question-raising abilities. Jesse will continue to read and listen to biographies, historical fiction, and history/ geography books and magazines relating to chosen Social Studies themes. Jesse will help to choose the area of focused study. He will help plan projects relating to the area chosen, with a goal being to share his project at a spring History and Science Fair for Homeschoolers. It is our educational philosophy that these themes should not be discreet “packages” of knowledge, completed and then forgotten, but instead should be readily related one to another, seeing the common links throughout history, the overlap of one area with another.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

—Jesse will continue to take part in regular daily physical activity aimed at developing aerobic health, adequate muscular strength, and flexibility. Our emphasis is on introducing Jesse to lifelong healthful activities that people of many ages can take part in.

MUSIC

—Jesse will continue to sing with our family regularly, especially focusing on the music of our folk heritage. Whenever possible, songs and music from a time period studied in Social Studies will be listened to and learned, again striving for unity and interdisciplinary work. Jesse will continue to improve his voice quality and ability to sing with good intonation and pitch. A special emphasis will be on continuing to learn to sing rounds in a large group setting, with possible performance possibilities.

2.2 Barb Snider’s Objectives

Here are the sixth grade educational objectives written and submitted by homeschooler Barb Snider with her affidavit for her daughter Rebecca.

ENGLISH, to include spelling reading and writing

—Literature based sustained silent reading program—at least 45 minutes daily.

—Read aloud to preschoolers.

—Reading from a variety of fiction, nonfiction, history, mythology, folk tales, biography, mystery, poetry, plays.

—Improve spelling skills through the use of a spelling list and correction of spelling errors made.

—Improve reference and study skills.

—Learn about the resources and uses of the library.

—Improve grammar skills using *Learning Grammar Through Writing*.

—Sustained silent writing program—journals, letters, poems, essays, reports, etc.

—Learn to correct her own writing using *Learning Grammar Through Writing*.

—Improve grammar skills through textbooks, tapes and games.

ARITHMETIC

—Improve her ability to manipulate whole numbers through addition.

—Improve her ability to use decimals and fractions.

—Improve her ability to solve word problems.

—Improve her ability to understand and use mathematical relationships.

—Improve her ability to solve money problems.

—Improve her measurement skills and her ability to solve problems involving measurements.

—Improve her graph reading ability.

—Develop her ability to understand and use scale measurements.

—Continue to use math in practical applications such as the kitchen, the garden, the grocery store, traveling, etc.

SCIENCE

—To increase her knowledge of the scientific process.

—To encourage science experimentation and child directed learning.

—To turn everyday experiences into science lessons (such as dissecting a nonpoisonous snake that found its way into a local greenhouse).

—To encourage reading about science and scientists in a wide field of interest.

—To encourage a love and respect for nature and an understanding of natural processes.

—To increase knowledge of nature through the use of guide books and resource persons.

—To learn the use of science textbooks and other resources when needed.

GEOGRAPHY, HISTORY, CIVICS

—To develop a concept of history as a continuum, through the use of a time line notebook used from year to year, learning about world history, United States history, and Pennsylvania history.

—To develop an appreciation of Pennsylvania's heritage through the understanding of Pennsylvania history and geography. This will necessarily include the use of books, magazines, maps, local resource persons, the library, travel, and other resources as we discover them.

—Continue to develop her interest in all kinds of history through the use of

reading materials on World, United States, and Pennsylvania history and maps of the World, United States, and Pennsylvania.

—Continue to develop her interest in Pennsylvania and United States history through field trips.

—Continue to develop her map and globe use skills, especially of the United States, Pennsylvania, the Far East, Franklin County and local cities and towns.

—Further develop her interest in history and acquaint her with those of import in history. She will read a variety of biographies, histories and historical fiction.

—To stimulate her thinking abilities, we will use discussion, research and reading to compare and contrast different historical figures, their times, cultures and circumstances to come to a better understanding of their place and impact on history.

—Learn to use specific history, civics and geography texts as needed.

—Using field trips, she will be encouraged to appreciate and understand the people and geography of our country.

SAFETY EDUCATION (including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires)

—Become knowledgeable about bicycle safety.

—Become acquainted with and knowledgeable about emergency and first aid procedures.

—Become more knowledgeable about stranger safety.

—Practice escape routes from our home in the event of fire.

—Learn about fire prevention.

—Become more knowledgeable about procedures in the event of a fire in the home, on her person, on a friend.

—Become more knowledgeable about street and traffic safety.

HEALTH AND PHYSIOLOGY

—Increase her knowledge of the human body and its systems.

—Improve her understanding of personal hygiene, what it is, why it is necessary.

—Improve her understanding of dental hygiene, what it is and why it is necessary.

—Learn about health maintenance.

—Increase her knowledge of good nutrition and other areas affecting good health.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

—Continue to encourage gross and fine motor skill development.

—Begin to develop an interest in, and facility with activities that will serve to provide opportunities to be physically and aerobically fit through her adult life.

—Become acquainted with various

team sports including the rules to play by, good sportsmanship, and skills necessary to participate in the sports.

—Continue to develop her ability with various individual activities such as bike riding, running, gymnastics, jumping, etc.

MUSIC

—Continue with Suzuki piano lessons.

—Continue to become acquainted with music history.

—Increase her music appreciation by listening to classical, baroque, opera, folk, and hymn music.

—Increase her appreciation of music by attending concerts and visiting musicians.

—Develop her singing ability through choir participation.

ART

—Improve her knowledge of art history by reading histories of the arts, biographies of artists, placement of trends in art on the time line mentioned in the section on history, and discussions with parents and other resource persons.

—Improve her ability to use various art mediums such as pen and ink, pencil, watercolor, acrylics, etc.

—Learn to appreciate and critique art by picture studies, field trips to art museums, reading and participating in discussions with parents and other resource persons.

—Discover and learn crafts of her choosing to include bookbinding and others.

—Discover the effect of culture on art and the effect of art on culture through the study of art pieces and reading.

—Develop a facility with calligraphy.

2.3 Another Set of Objectives

Here are the second grade educational objectives written and submitted by another homeschooling family for their son.

SPELLING

—Begin to write words by their phonetic compositions, word families, and common spelling patterns.

—Begin to write sight words from memory.

READING

—Read easy readers.

—Listen to fine literature on a variety of topics.

—Discuss author's voice, style differences among different authors, tone, plot structure, characterization, use of language, and our reactions and responses to the piece of literature.

—Beginning use of reference materials. and listen to quality informational readings. Begin learning to use digital skills to gather information.

WRITING

- Refine manuscript writing.
 - Capitalization and punctuation.
 - Compose letters and stories.
 - Keep a journal.
- ARITHMETIC**
- Addition and subtraction facts.
 - Place value through hundreds.
 - Introduction to multiplication.
 - Telling time.
 - Use of calendar.
 - Count by twos, fives and tens.
 - Handling of money (coins).
 - One-step problem solving.
 - Introduction to metric measurement.
 - Identifying and creating geometric shapes.

- SCIENCE**
- Small animals of North America.
 - How plants grow and get food.
 - Pollination.
 - Basic food groups and nutrition.
 - Dinosaurs and origins.
 - Native plants of Pennsylvania and their uses.
 - Prominent names in science.
 - Bees.

- GEOGRAPHY**
- Map making of the neighborhood.
 - Communities in other lands.
 - Personal, live observations of city, country, beach, mountains.

- HISTORY**
- Civil War.
 - Valley Forge during the American Revolution.
 - Bio's of prominent individuals.
 - Bible.
 - American Indians.
 - Pioneers.
 - Pilgrims to the New World.
 - Ancient Egypt.

- CIVICS**
- Follow current events on a national and state level.
 - Holidays and festivals.
 - Patriotism.
 - What people do (jobs).
 - Prayer for self, others, government leaders.
 - Apply the Golden Rule.

- SAFETY ED. AND FIRE SAFETY**
- Kitchen safety and fire instruction.
 - Fireplace safety and fire instruction.
 - Safety during physically active play and in sports.
 - Crossing streets.

- HEALTH AND PHYSIOLOGY**
- Dental care.
 - Personal care and use of health care workers.

- Major systems of the body

(circulatory, digestive, respiratory and nervous).

- Proper balance of activities.
- Prominent names in health care.
- Olympics.
- Dangers of alcohol abuse.
- Sexuality and reproductive systems.

PHYSICAL EDUCATION

- Active, outdoor play including games, riding bicycle, soccer.
- Develop lifetime sport of golf.
- Swimming regularly in summer.
- Hiking, indoor hockey and other active pastimes.

MUSIC

- Listening to various styles of music.
- Using music for play and creative personal expression.

- Experiment with harmonica playing.
- Singing alone and in groups.
- Familiarity with US folk songs.
- Study the use of musical instruments in church and in concerts.
- Learn songs of worship.

ART

- Use of various media for creative visual expression including plasticine, various paints, magic markers, pencils, cloth, wood, oil pastels, mosaics, glue, crayons.

- Attend art lessons at local museum.
- Observe and discuss prominent art works exhibited at the local museum.
- Picture book observations.
- Art of historic cultures (Egyptian, American Indian).
- Clean up and respect of materials.

2.4 Our High School English Goals

We ([PHAA](#)) have requirements for a high school English course which go beyond the requirements of the home education law. Those pursuing our diploma option may want to include these requirements in their listed objectives:

- Read 25 books *or* a literature anthology and 15 books.
- Read at least 3 classics.
- Write at least 4 compositions.
- Write a composition that is at least 2500 words long (approx. 10 pages).
- Keep rough drafts of compositions which show that punctuation, usage, and/or grammatical errors were corrected in the process of writing these compositions *or* work through over 1/4 of a language or grammar textbook *or* log at least 45 daily entries of work in language or grammar study.
- Give at least one speech during the year to a group outside of the immediate family.

2.5 Distance Courses, Co-op Classes, Private Teachers

Many homeschool students are taking distance courses in some subject areas, often via the Internet, and objectives for these courses are usually provided by the distance program. For example, many high school homeschoolers in Pennsylvania take part in some of the Advanced Placement (AP) Online Test Preparation classes that are offered from Pennsylvania Homeschoolers-- the class description found on our website could be used in writing your objectives for the course, and the teacher may also provide further learning objectives to families if asked.

Likewise, if your child is taking a class through a homeschool co-op program that meets weekly, the teacher could help provide you with class objectives. If you have an outside private teacher or tutor for a particular course, that person could help with objectives for that subject.

2.6 PA Department of Education

Over the years, the State Board of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Education have developed various sets of academic standards which are available on the Pennsylvania Department of Education website.

The State Board of Education developed [Academic Standards](#) for arts and humanities, career education, civics, economics, English, consumer science, environment, geography, history, reading and writing in social studies, math, science,, health, safety and physical education. Interestingly enough, at every grade level it is strongly recommended that students read at least 25 books, just what is required for the PHAA diploma program!

Within the PA Dept of Ed website, you can also access the [Assessment Anchors](#) that have been developed to guide the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing program. These are currently available for mathematics, reading, and science. These have objectives as well as sample test items related to those objectives. Especially useful for those families opting to take part in the PSSA testing program.

For the high school level, some families may be interested in using goals set by the [Standards Aligned System](#) curriculum. These include curriculum for for arts and humanities, driver and safety education, economic education, English, environment, health, physical education, math, science, social studies, technology education, and foreign languages.

3. Extra Requirement for Handicapped Children

Any student who has been identified pursuant to the provisions of the Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law 91-230 U.S.C. # 1401 et. seq.) as needing special education services, excluding those students identified as gifted and/or talented, shall be in compliance with the requirements of compulsory attendance by participating in a home education program, as defined in Section 1327.1, when the program addresses the specific needs of the exceptional student and is approved by a teacher with a valid certificate from the Commonwealth to teach special education or a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist, and written notification of such approval is submitted with the notarized affidavit required under Section 1327.1 (b). The supervisor of a home education program may request that the school district or intermediate district of residence provide services that address the specific needs of the exceptional student in the home education program. When the provision of services is agreed to by both the supervisor and the school district or intermediate unit, all services shall be provided in the public schools or in a private school licensed to provide such programs and services. — Act 169 of 1988

Nothing in this section shall be construed to affect Federal or State law relating to special education for students with disabilities in home education programs. -- Act 196 of 2014.

Parents whose children have been officially labeled as handicapped (intellectually disabled, learning disabled, socially and emotionally disturbed, visually impaired, hearing impaired, physically handicapped, or speech and language impaired) must get a Pennsylvania certified special education teacher or a certified school psychologist or a licensed clinical psychologist to approve their home education program and should attach the written approval to the notarized affidavit. Generally, only children who have been in school get labeled as handicapped. You would know if your child had been labeled because you would have been asked to sign a form agreeing to the label so that your child could receive special education services.

If you *want* your child to participate in special education classes in a public or private school, then the new law specifies that you can make that arrangement.

The main problem for parents of handicapped children will be to find a special education teacher or licensed

psychologist who will approve their program. We have an updated list of friendly special education teachers and psychologists which we publish as part of our list of qualified evaluators in each issue of *Pennsylvania Homeschoolers*. As you can see, a lot of time and thought can go into writing an evaluation such as this. Parents should realize that they will need to fairly compensate Special Education teachers or psychologists who offer this service to them.

3.1 Sample Approval Letter

Here is a sample approval letter which combines two letters written by a former special education teacher. She met with the homeschooling mother twice before she wrote the letter, which was filed with the affidavit. The first time she examined the books and materials that the family was using and had a chance to talk with the child informally over snacks. The second time, she privately discussed the family's educational objectives with the mother while their children played.

Dear Dr. Z:

I have been asked by Mrs. Y to review her home schooling program for her son X. The following is a list of my credentials and my background in special education: BS in elementary/special education from XYZ University; MS in special education from XYZ University; Certified in special education in the state of Pennsylvania; Taught four years for ABC Intermediate Unit; Taught one year for DEF Intermediate Unit.

Having reviewed the home schooling program of Mrs. Y for her son X, it is my opinion that the program is appropriate and meets the child's needs.

Mrs. Y will use textbooks and other materials that are on X's instructional level rather than his frustration level. When employing texts with more advanced vocabulary, she can take time to explain as necessary, thus enabling X to study materials more appropriate for his age level.

Because of his limited attention span and language processing difficulties, X can learn more readily during short periods of time having small amounts of material presented with immediate feedback and frequent reinforcement. Mrs. Y has structured her daily teaching schedule accordingly and, if necessary, can interrupt a lesson to intersperse with short periods of physical activities.

During these times, she can include gross and fine motor activities, e.g.

charades, obstacle courses, Twister, to increase coordination and body awareness. In addition, remedial activities that are timed to include treasure hunts, puzzle races, cooking projects, etc., can be implemented to increase X's ability to attend and respond efficiently to general directions and assignments.

Great emphasis will be placed on enhancing X's ability to communicate verbally more appropriately and without undue hesitation or pressured speech. He will be encouraged to engage in extended forms of verbal communication, e.g., free verbal interaction, role playing, round robin stories and recalling experiences. These will be tape recorded and played back to demonstrate to the child his progress in developing more fluency of speech.

Mrs. Y's program will encourage the child to read for pleasure and thereby gain confidence in using this skill as a primary learning tool. As an incentive, X has his own library cards at both the XYZ library and the ABC Library, and visits the libraries frequently to borrow books and attend various events. In addition, Mrs. Y will continue to work on word attack skills and phonics as well as comprehension skills, e.g., cause-and-effect relationships, folklore to discuss abstraction and logical and illogical happenings.

The program will meet the child's needs for positive social interaction by continuing his involvement in a church-related youth activity, as well as by attending Sunday School. The professional involvement with youth on the part of the child's stepfather, a clergyman, occasions additional outings that provide loving acceptance by his peers. He will also meet regularly with other home education students for special activities and field trips.

Mrs. Y is aware of the need to work with X in problem areas, such as distractibility, auditory memory, categorization, and perseverance. The tutoring situation is ideal for allowing an overlap of school work and home life in addressing these problems on an ongoing basis.

It is my opinion that the home education program for X will result in good progress both academically and in building self-esteem.

I have requested a copy of my teaching certificate with a name change from the Bureau of Teacher Certification in Harrisburg and will send you a copy as soon as I receive it.

4. Keeping a Portfolio

In order to demonstrate that appropriate education is occurring, the supervisor of the home education program shall provide and maintain on file the following documentation for each student enrolled in the home education program:

(1) A portfolio of records and materials. The portfolio shall consist of a log, made contemporaneously with the instruction, which designates by title the reading materials used, samples of any writings, work sheets, workbooks or creative materials used or developed by the student. — Act 169 of 1988

In order to prove that you are educating your child you must keep a portfolio of his or her work. At the end of the year you will have this portfolio reviewed by a private teacher or psychologist who will write an evaluation of your child's progress. The portfolio no longer needs to be turned into the local school district-- only the written evaluation does, no later than June 30.

Your portfolio must show that you are giving your child an "appropriate education," which means that your child is receiving instruction in the required subjects for the required time and is demonstrating sustained progress in the overall program.

We recommend that you keep your portfolio in two parts — a daily log and a portfolio album.

4.1 Daily Log

According to the Office of Chief Counsel at the PA Department of Education, your daily log "must identify specific dates of instruction and the materials used on each date, because the log by definition is a 'day to day' record."

Some parents keep a single daily log for all of their home-educated children. Others keep separate daily logs for each child. Many home-educated children keep their own daily logs-- and we definitely recommend this. Whichever way you choose, make sure that you list by title the reading materials used, and show that you are teaching for the proper amount of time:

1. Elementary Level (grades 1-6)

— 180 days or 900 hours per year.

2. Secondary Level (grades 7-12)

— 180 days or 990 hours per year.

You have a choice about whether to document hours or days in your log. Most parents find days easier, though some find it simple to jot down hours at the end of each day, especially with older students. You do not need to only consider official "book work" as your homeschool time, but can certainly consider all in-depth

discussions, project times, field trips, sporting events, educational videos, and outside classes that your child might participate in.

You don't have to teach every subject every day. If you don't show much documentation of the required subjects in your log, you should balance it by documenting them fairly completely in your portfolio album. In general we recommend that those who keep very scanty logs should keep very complete portfolio albums, and those who keep very scanty portfolio albums should keep detailed logs.

Another thing to remember is that you are not held to the public school calendar. Many homeschoolers have important activities going on during the summer months, and you can feel free to document those days also, perhaps gaining extra "vacation" days in December. We also keep track of important things that we do on the weekends — when we read and discuss a major news story, or when the kids spend an hour or more playing a geography game on Saturday, or take part in our monthly square dance, they get can easily enter it on their logs-- but we personally just count a 7-day week as 5 days of credit (makes it much easier to count up, and we're not in a race to finish our 180!). You might also want to include a one page, yearlong calendar in the front of your log or portfolio album that has your days of instruction circled — this would be a very quick way to show your evaluator that you put in your 180 days.

We have certainly heard some grumbling from some homeschoolers worried about how much time keeping a log will take. Some people worry that they are expected to follow their child around, spiral notebook in hand, and write down every word uttered, every learning discovery or question raised. Obviously more than a simple check mark that indicates "attendance" is required, but daily summary notes can certainly be brief jottings, not fully developed essays! If it takes you longer to keep your log than to actually work with your children, then figure you're doing something wrong. Experiment around until you find a way that seems complete enough without being an undo burden. When students are in charge of filling out their own logs, it's of course important for parents to remember to remind them about this task-- and have a way that is easy to update if a few days or a week have gone by without noting anything. Whatever form you use, it should

get a bit faster with experience.

What format can your log take? Some people use teacher's planning books which feature a grid with subjects or time-slots across the top and days of the week down the side. We sell *The Home Schoolers' Journal*, one such planning book, which many people have found to be helpful and flexible, and many appreciate the features such as the booklist chart, field trip summary pages, and more. Other people use spiral notebooks, *Daytimers*, or big block calendars. Still others use individually developed photocopied forms which they will later bind together into a notebook or place in their portfolio album. There are many online computer options now available also.

A number of families use a checkoff system for their daily logs. The parents or children write down the planned assignments ahead of time on the assignment sheet or in the notebook or planning book, and then the children check off the assignments as soon as they are completed. If a planned assignment is not accomplished, it is simply not checked off. This system not only helps the families plan their homeschooling day, but it also helps the children know what they need to accomplish.

A number of families have involved their children in the keeping of their own daily logs. Here are three examples:

1. Emily Murphy (age 16) kept her daily log in a "Daytimer" book. Each morning Emily wrote her goals for the day on the left hand page and then, throughout the day, she checked them off as she finished each item. On the facing page she recorded anything extra that was interesting. Following are her entries for a particular day in March, 1989. On the left hand page under the *Daytimer's* heading, "TO BE DONE TODAY," Emily has written the following objectives by subject areas (history, French, literature, geometry, and chemistry). Seven of the thirteen objectives were checked off on this particular day: [Note: the Presidents were done as part of a big project where Emily completed a huge, and very attractive poster giving information on all U.S. Presidents.]

His	Get 8 more Presidents done <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Do questions on 22 <input type="checkbox"/>
	Do test <input type="checkbox"/>
Fre	Listen to tape <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Review Unit II <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
	Read the 1st story in <i>Le Treseur</i> <input type="checkbox"/>

- Lit Study Biography of Joyce ✓
Test on Joyce _____
Read "Rocking Horse Winner" _____
- Geom Finish 7 ✓
Read 8 ✓
- Chem Reread 11 _____
Do Problems _____

On the facing page, Emily has kept her journal. She writes:

Yesterday I got (from the library) a Reading (unabridged) of Josephine Tey's The Daughter of Time. It's a novel about the debunking of the Richard III murdering the princes in the Tower so I'm going to find out what the Encyclopedia Britannica says about Richard III and Henry VII.

EB [Encyclopedia Britannica] says there was a rumor that the kids were killed in 1453. Must get a biography of Richard III.



2. Molly Richman (age 14) prepared one log form (shown above) that she used every week. She prepared a chart (on the computer, so she can modify the chart

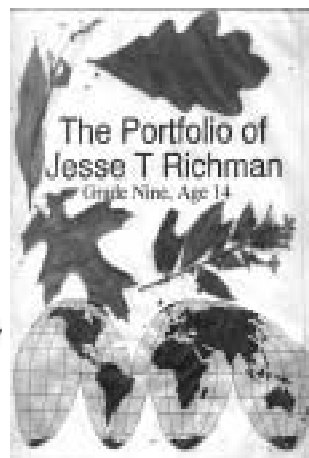
Your portfolio's cover is its introduction. Here's how some homeschoolers decorated theirs! Other possibilities-- decorate your cover with fabric, wallpaper, computer art, photographs, fancy lettering... the sky's the limit.

The note on Elisa's cover (shown on the right) says: "All of the writing, gluing, cutting, typing, word processing, and arranging were done by me. All that is in this portfolio... is an example of the work that I did this year, and it is all to the glory of God.

Elisa Martinez

A Portfolio for the
School Year of 1989-1990
Karen Elisa Martinez

Note: All of the writing, gluing, cutting, typing, word processing, and arranging were done by me. All that is in this portfolio, except the photography, is an example of the work that I did this year, and it is all to the glory of God.
K. Elmartz Martinez, April 19, 1990



This cover shows two of Jesse's loves: Nature and geography

Hannah drew this lovely colored-pencil lady, slid her into a sheet protector, and taped her onto this portfolio cover with clear tape!



later) which encompasses a wide range of educational activities--because the object isn't to list what she will complete every single day, but to list almost every activity that she might possibly complete. (This saves writing-time later!) Whenever she does something worthy of listing, she highlights both what she did and the day of the week that she did it on. A sample chart:

3. Tara Culp (age 10) kept her own log in a teacher's planning book. Monday through Friday are the headings down the left side of the page while the seven different subject areas are written across the top of the page. Since there are more subjects than subject areas, several subjects are combined in a few of the columns.

One of the subjects is "Penmanship." Each day Tara has written the words "School plan book," since keeping this planning book is a chance for her to practice neat handwriting. Sometimes Tara's mother, Anita, has written in additional information overlooked by Tara. When Tara uses a textbook she writes the name of the textbook and the page number. For subjects where Tara has done creative activities, brief jottings about the activities are noted. For example, in the Language column for one very creative week the log looks something like this:

- MON Wrote a poem, went through play
- TUE Wrote a story about a soldier
- WED Made a newspaper
- THU Went through whole play with homeschoolers
- FRI *New Language & Usage* pg. 64

4.2 Portfolio Album

The law specifies that along with your log, you should keep achievement test results when required (see Chapter 5) and samples of any writings, work sheets, or



Math work in your portfolio doesn't have to come from text books--it can include samples such as this Math Olympiad contest problem set, from our daughter Hannah.

creative materials used or developed by the student. There are many possible ways to organize these work samples-- using pocket folders for each subject, hanging file folders in a portable holder, or a three-ring binder-- and some homeschoolers are now moving towards creating a **digital portfolio**, which let you use technology to capture and share a broad range of learning. Whatever method you choose to use, the key is **organization and selection**. Organize by subject area so that others can see clearly what has been done, and select samples carefully to show the full range of types of learning activities completed. Shoving everything into a box does not constitute a portfolio! Also do have a separate portfolio for each child in the family, even if you decide to have a joint field trip or special events notebook.

Some parents wonder how 'fancy' to make their portfolio-- is it necessary to

Summary Page Ideas...

Here's a, well, summary of various summary page ideas. Think of it as a smorgasbord of possibilities!

Many evaluators like to see brief summaries of how each subject was studied, written at the end of the year by the student or parent. (So these tell what really happened, not what was supposed to happen as the objectives show! Let's face it, there's usually a difference.) This is Molly's art and music summary for tenth grade, which she used partly to list the ways that she earned high school credit for PHAA.



JULY	AUGUST	SEPTEMBER
Kreaked Creek Umbrella Ph.D.C. 4th Home Days Homeschool Trial in Pgh. Homeschool Trial in Butler Philadelphia - Homeschool Conference, visits with friends + relatives	Pittsburgh Incline Music: Gershwin, Suzuki Carol Niccum's home, Pgh. Edible Arts Festival Library P. use Party for Summer Reading Club	On Set of Pittsburgh-20y TV show in home schooling Pittsburgh Zoo Members Picnic Homeschooler's Arts Festival at Coppertown in W. Kanawha Tie-Dye Day after Homeschooler Soccer game
OCTOBER	NOVEMBER	DECEMBER
Trombone's Piano Recital Mrs. Nancy Stetham's Wedding Piano Recital Fresh Five Arts Bldg - tour of Edinburgh's park-thing concert of September school Stacy Chabauty talk to group about book writing contest Bull Science Center Reading - all things music!	Art - Photography materi- cals and rolls at Lighthouse Election Debate at Court- house - 4-10-98 Mem. of E. F. Yates - opera JUL Meetin Mem. Olympiad - 19 meet. Library Conf. - Newcastle 4th Incline again - 10-10-98	Harrisburg - Legislator's Lesson, Senate - House Mem. Olympiad - 2nd meet. Christmas Music Play-in Mrs. Stetham's, Leesburg.

A list of all the field trips and outside activities that our children take part in is very useful. Such lists show that children are finding out about the world through firsthand experiences and that they are learning from many others beyond mom and dad. Find an easy digital format, too!

1997 - 1998 School Year

KEVIN GRAY'S NINTH YEAR BOOK LIST

The Church of the East	Stewart/Holzman
Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH (N&M)	O'Brien
The Old Man and the Sea	Hemingway
Ken-Tiki	Heyerdahl
Murder On the Orient Express	Christie
Much Ado About Nothing	Shakespeare
The Light and the Glory	Marshall
The Great Gatsby	Fitzgerald
All Quiet on the Western Front	Remarque
The Great Gilly Hopkins (NH)	Paterson
A Christmas Carol	Dickens
You Want Women to Vote, Lousy Stanton?	Fritz
Albert Einstein	Unknown
The Lost World	Crichton
Alexander	Townson
Alexander the Great, Scientist-King	Suggs
For Whom the Bell Tolls	Hemingway
Me and My Little Brain	Fitzgerald
I Kissed Dating Good-Bye	Harris
Macbeth	Shakespeare
Run, Baby, Run	Cruz
Let 100 Flowers Bloom	Real
When Hitler Stole Pink Rabbit (ALAN)	Kerr
Don't Check Your Brain at the Door	McDowell
Island of the Blue Dolphins	O'Dell
The Road from Home	Khaldun
Winston Churchill: Soldier, Statesman, Artist	Sevenson

27 Total Books Read to Date

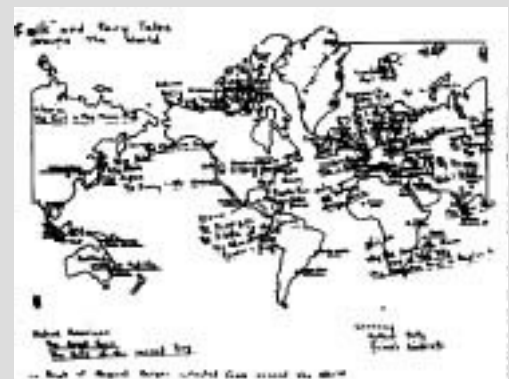
Hooray, I've conquered my first year in high-school!!!

Some homeschoolers write up quick summaries for each of the field trips which they participate in. Even brief captions to field trip brochures show that the student was attentive and alert. This one is from Jesse's 6th grade portfolio.



A very common and very helpful type of summary page is a list of books read by or to the student. When the final list is tied up on computer, it's also easy to just give the evaluator a copy for her files. This booklist is from Kevin Gray after his first year at the high school level, where he more than met the PHAA requirement of reading 2 books and at least three classics.

Here's a summary page of folk and fairy tales from Jenny Rimmer's portfolio. She and her mother read all of these stories this year. The page shows a map of the world with the names of the fairy tales listed with arrows pointing to their country of origin. This page shows that their wide reading of folk tales was tied in with their study of geography.



... And More Summary Page Ideas!

Sheena Ratcliffe loved to use the Internet for learning in all areas when in 7th grade, and included on each subject divider a listing of her favorite websites for that area, making a good summary of the varied resources she'd used. (Another terrific resource she and her older sister Shurie both shared in their portfolios was a series of creative learning games they'd developed to help them review material in science and history. They even gave me a quick demonstration of how to use the games during our meeting!)

If you are like most homeschoolers, you are looking for more ways to document your physical education program in your portfolios. You can share how you logged fitness activities in a program like the President's Youth Fitness Program (PYFP). On their PFYP@Home website they have instructional videos on how to do perfect pushups, curl-ups, sit and reach, and do a pacer running test. They also have a downloadable spread sheet in which you can record your daily results in these exercises:

Science and Health

Sites Visited on the Internet

- Animal Tracks
<http://www.vpservices.com/vps/rwf/games/match/matchgam.caf>
- Solar System
<http://amazing-space.stsci.edu/trading/directions.html>
- Solar System
<http://www.hawaii.edu/solar/solar/eng/3/homepage.htm>
- Children with Diabetes
<http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/>
- Chat Room at Children with Diabetes
<http://www.childrenwithdiabetes.com/chat/cwdsbwriteform.plx?chatname=Sheena&chatemail=&chatroom=Kids&nummsgs=20&refresh=40>
- What is Diabetes
http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings78935/what_is.html
- Kids R Pumping
<http://members.soi.com/GamelsRFun/index.html>
- Endocrine Disorders & Endocrine Surgery
<http://www.endocrineweb.com/>

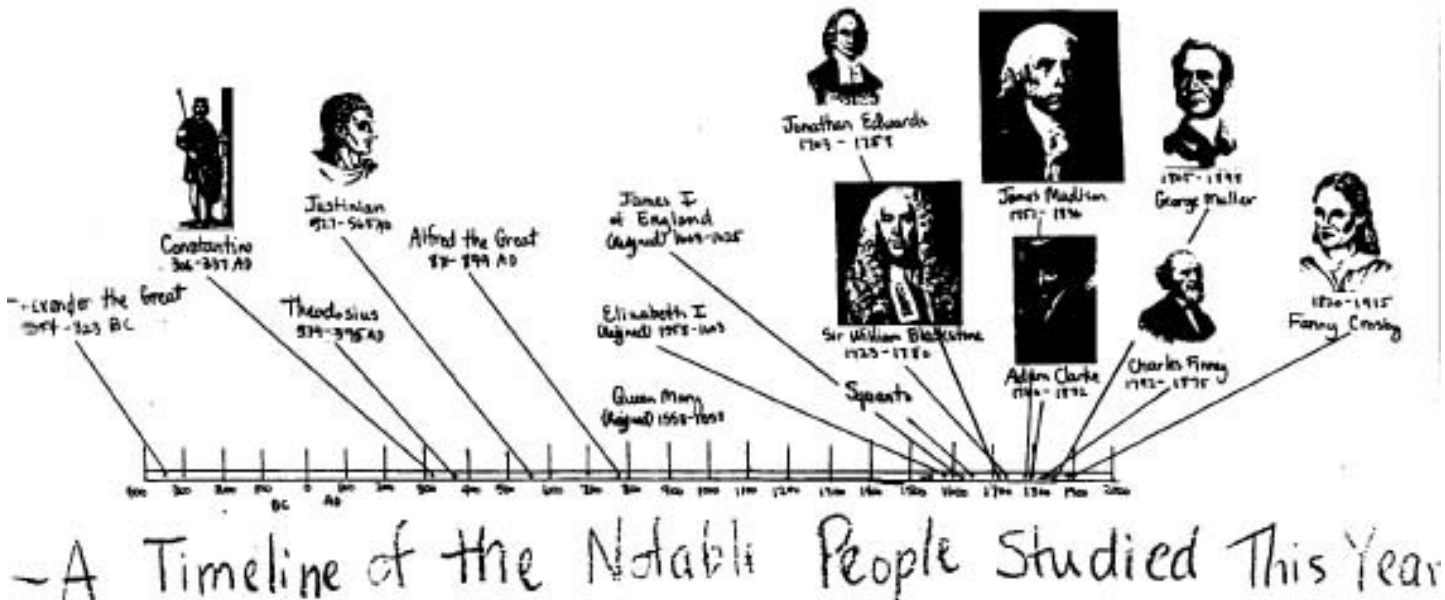
PYFP @ Home - Results Tracking

WORKOUT

MONTH:

Day	Day 1	Day 2	Day 3	Day 4	Day 5	Day 6	Day 7	Day 8	Day 9	Day 10	Day 11	Day 12	Day 13	Day 14
Push - Up														
Curl - Up														
Sit and Reach														
Pacer														
Squat														

Here's a timeline of the notable people that Elisa Martinez studied using Bill Gothard's ATI curriculum. The timeline goes from 400 B.C. to 2000 A.D. Some of the people studied are pictured, others are just named and a line has been drawn from the person to the time in history when he lived. Timelines like this are one way to show that the reading of biographies adds up to the study of history.



make the portfolio a 'Creative Memories' award winning presentation, or is it OK to just be generally organized, but without a lot of pizzazz? The quality of student work is of course the main thing evaluators will be looking at, and if you aren't the graphics design artist, it's all right-- just be organized. But as an evaluator, I have to admit that it's always welcome to see something that shows real care and thought-- the nice illustration by the child on the cover, no ripped off spiral notebook edges on papers, holes punched in properly so that pages aren't falling out continually as I leaf through things. And creative layout of photos, with captions by the student, is always a treat. My own school district liaison for homeschoolers once said to me that there were two types of homeschoolers-- the ones who really cared, and the ones who didn't seem to. His evidence? Some homeschoolers put real time and care into their portfolios, making them really nice to look at-- they had photos, original artwork, samples that were mounted carefully or protected with sheet protectors. He said you could tell these homeschoolers were probably going to be keeping the portfolios on a special shelf at home. This was in contrast to those who tossed a few bare samples into a dirty file folder-- not such a good impression was made. Even though now your superintendent won't be looking at your portfolio, your evaluator will!

How to organize a portfolio? We suggest an opening section for official papers-- a copy of the affidavit, your objectives, and eventually a copy of this year's evaluation letter. If the child is in grade 3, 5, or 8, test scores will need to be shown here, and some parents choose to show test scores in other years, including PSAT or SAT scores when students reach the high school years. Using notebook dividers or tab folders to separate subject areas in the portfolio helps make your organizational plan clear. Some parents put major core subject areas first (English, math, social studies, science), followed by the arts and fitness. Some families choose to put the student's strongest area first. Be sure to include something which shows you have taught every subject required by law. (See the affidavit form at the end of Chapter 1 for a listing of required subjects.) Don't make your evaluator ask, "Hmm, do anything in art or music this year?"

Some parents put portfolios together completely for their children-- and those who wait to the last minute may be up late the night before they meet with the evaluator! Other parents make the portfolios an ongoing family

homeschooling activity. They set aside a box or drawer where they put papers and pictures that might be mounted in the portfolios. Then periodically, throughout the year, their children will get out the portfolios and enter the papers and pictures in the notebook, with parents or children writing explanations where appropriate. The Brubaker family keeps their papers to be entered in a separate dishwashing tub for each of their children. Every Friday afternoon, the children get out their portfolio notebooks, mount papers and pictures, and write captions. If they have a paper which they might not want to put in now, but might want to later, they will put it under a red divider in the tub. Anything they decide not to use, they throw away. Remember-- the portfolio does not need to include *every* piece of work done all year.

Sometimes parents come to the evaluation meeting saying, "My kids put together their entire portfolios all by themselves. I'm not even sure what they included!" Evaluators can really cringe at this one, as they fear the parent may also have no clue what was done over the year-- and even the most motivated and independent student gains from having a parent check over the final portfolio to make sure standards of basic neatness and organization are upheld. Students have been known to leave out major papers, reading lists for the year, and whole subject areas.

With guidance, though, most students do indeed take over more and more of the work of organizing and maintaining their portfolios as they get older, and enjoy taking more ownership of their work. It's especially recommended that high school students get involved in writing subject area summaries for each section-- this can help them reflect on what they accomplished, and evaluators are always pleased to see this in a student. With the right attitude, and time on your side, you and your children can enjoy putting together the portfolio of work, and we hope that the process actually helps you and your children realize you have had a productive year of homeschooling. Putting together the portfolios over the year may help you see where you might have gaps in your program so that you can take steps to fill them in. Organizing the portfolio and looking over it can be one of the most helpful things you do all year to help gain perspective on what you are doing at home.

One organizational trick many families use-- put samples of similar, repetitive work all in one sheet protector or pocket divider-- maybe a whole group of spelling tests or math computation drills. It's easy to

take the work out and leaf through it quickly, but it's not as if every single spelling quiz is really worth putting in separately. A small file card slipped into the sheet protector labeled with the text or resource used, and a brief note on what was done can also help here-- "Sarah used the *Spelling Power* program, working from level D to level F this year, with daily quizzes and regular work with a range of spelling games and activities. I could see she's gradually using more correct spellings in her own writing too."

Finally, don't view your evaluator as the only audience for your portfolio. If your portfolio is nicely put together, you may enjoy sharing it with friends and family, or with new homeschoolers. Colleges admissions staff are often interested in seeing a high school homeschooler's portfolio during an interview. Also you'll probably find, as we have, that your own kids will enjoy looking back at their portfolios many years from now.

Many different types of samples of work may be included in the portfolios. Again, thinking of ways to show the full range of ways you go about learning is key-- don't just show workbook pages if you also take part in a project competition or fair, or enjoy watching educational videos, or like to read widely in subject areas. Find easy ways to show variety of learning modes.

The math section will naturally have samples of math work completed. It's important for work to be checked if it goes in the portfolio-- nothing is worse than for an evaluator to notice that a student has been doing math problems wrong on many papers, and no one seemed to notice. Many older students are involved of course in checking their own daily work.

Some students even include graphs of their test results throughout the year. Keeping these charts may not only be a way to (hopefully!) show progress throughout the school year to a curious evaluator or superintendent, but it has encouraged students to work carefully and diligently on their math work throughout the school year.

If students are in a math competition of any sort, putting in sample problems or certificates earned is a natural, and adds interest and variety to the work samples.

If a work of art is too large to fit into a portfolio album, sometimes the family will take a photograph of the art project and mount the photograph in the portfolio-- and of course many families simply bring along a box for pottery, weavings, posters, crafts projects, and more, to show at the

evaluation meeting. Often these extras are not taken in to the school district, as they are just too bulky and could get lost or damaged. Sometimes, though, the art is drawn especially for the portfolio album, as when a child makes a special cover or opening page. I often find myself collecting the little sketches my daughters do throughout every day, as we glue many of them on to subject dividers throughout their portfolio where appropriate.

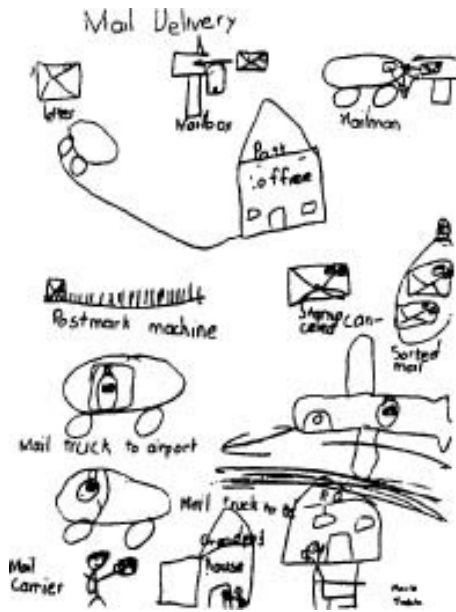
Several families put together family newsletters or blogs which they then send out to relatives and friends, and include in their portfolios. These newsletters can serve many purposes. They can help you keep your relatives in touch with what you are doing and be good public relations. They also provide your child with an audience and a regular forum for written compositions. Children will be more willing to take the time to polish up a composition if they know it will be published. Here is the first page of a newsletter put together by our kids:



Sometimes it is possible to arrange the samples of work to show that a student is making progress. Showing a selection of samples of handwriting from the beginning, middle, and end of the year can show that the child got better at cursive. Similarly, showing a selection of typing practice samples, or scores on a computer math game, or showing that a child has moved from reading very simple *I Can Read* books in September to beginning chapter books by May (maybe even including a photocopied pages of sample stories) can all be great ways to show dramatic progress was made in an area.

One of the best ways to show progress is through written reports and essays. When a student writes about something that he has studied, it is clear that he has learned about it.

Reports can even be drawn! First grader Mark Tisdale drew the report below after learning about the post office. It shows the progress that a letter takes, leaving his house on the way to Grandpa's house:



Other things to include, that can all help show the breadth of your program and the range of learning activities are copies of favorite sheet music played, important newspaper articles read (best with at least a brief caption telling how it was used), samples from different workbooks used, info on computer programs websites used, lists of educational videos watched (again, a few responses describing what was learned are a help), and so on. Be creative--in 11th grade Molly even photocopied her graphing calculator, and wrote little notes around the outside pointing about all she'd learned about its advanced uses! Most evaluators really appreciate info about extracurricular activities, special hobbies, or group activities. Showing photos of special group events or classes and documentation of service work in the larger community is perfect.

4.3 Sharing Your Portfolio

At the end of each school year, you share your portfolio with the **evaluator** that you choose. (For more information on evaluators, see Chapter 6.)

Your evaluator will write an evaluation letter which certifies whether you are giving your child an appropriate education.

You must turn in that evaluation letter to the school superintendent by June 30 at the end of the school year.

5. Testing

In grades three, five and eight [the portfolio shall include] results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests in reading/language arts and mathematics or the results of Statewide tests administered in these grade levels. The department shall establish a list, with a minimum of five tests, of nationally normed standardized tests from which the supervisor of the home education program shall select a test to be administered if the supervisor does not choose the Statewide tests. At the discretion of the supervisor, the portfolio may include the results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests for other subject areas or grade levels. The supervisor shall ensure that the nationally normed standardized tests or the Statewide tests shall not be administered by the child's parent or guardian.—Act 169 of 1988

If your child is in grade 3, 5, or 8, your child's portfolio *must* include the results of a standardized test for at least reading and math. The test can cover other subjects as well — that is your option.

5.1 Testing Options

There are now eleven standardized achievement tests which have been [approved by the Pennsylvania Department of Education](#). The first seven tests are group tests, and are usually given in a group testing situation. The last four on the list are individual achievement tests which are given one-on-one by a professional teacher, counselor or psychologist to an individual student. The tests are:

1. California Achievement Test
2. Comprehensive Testing Program
3. Iowa Test of Basic Skills
4. Measures of Academic Progress
5. Metropolitan Achievement Test
6. Stanford Achievement Test
7. TerraNova
8. Peabody Achievement Individual Test – Revised Version
9. Woodcock Johnson Tests of Ach III
10. Woodcock Johnson IV
11. Wechsler Individual Achievement Test III (WIAT-III)

Group standardized tests can be taken in either the fall or spring. Many parents find fall testing to be less threatening because weak areas can be addressed by showing progress in the portfolio since the testing date. Then the evaluator can explain that the student made progress since the low test scores.

School districts often offer to test children free in school, though many parents choose to test privately so that they can insure a friendly testing environment for their children, and so that they can have control over whether the school superintendent sees the test results.

In no case may you include the results of a standardized test in your portfolio in 3rd, 5th, or 8th grade, if you or your spouse has administered the test to your own children.

Individual achievement tests may be taken at any time during the year. They are ideally suited for students who have difficulty with group tests or with working under time pressure. They are commonly used for handicapped children or others who would be frustrated by a test at their grade level.

5.2 Sources for Private Testing

Evaluators and Individual Tests

Many home education program evaluators offer individual testing services. To find an evaluator who gives such tests near you, check out the [PHAA Evaluators Listing](#) and look for the **I** (for Individual Testing) by their names.

Internet Test Options

For this option, you will need to find (and in most cases compensate) a local person qualified to give the test. Tests are usually sent directly to the person who will administer the test, and not to the parent, to meet test security guidelines from test publishers. **One of the best is [Bob Jones University Testing Service](#).**

Support Groups

Some support groups offer group testing. There is a [list of support groups](#) from across Pennsylvania on the PHAA website.

5.3 PSSA Testing

One testing option for homeschoolers is to take part in the PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing offered in grades 3 through 8 in the public schools. Things to know:

1. Homeschoolers are NOT required to take this public school test.

Homeschoolers *can* take part if a family wants to— and if you do, then you need to have your child take ALL parts of the test. You can't 'pick and choose'. For grades 5, 8, and 11, the PSSA includes a WRITING section, which includes the student writing a response to a writing prompt, similar to the new College Board SAT Writing section. Some districts may send you a

letter making it sound like you *must* take part, but this is not so.

2. IF you opt to take part, notify your local school district early in the school year and definitely by early January. Some parts of the test begin in February, other parts are given in March. You can NOT ask to have a later-in-the-year administration. A full calendar is at the PDE website. If you take this test, you follow all rules.

3. You can NOT ask to have your local homeschool group give this test— The PSSA can only be given in a school, and most likely your child would be going into a classroom and feel at least a bit like a 'new kid' who doesn't know any of the school routines-- could be a good idea to meet briefly with the teacher beforehand if possible.

4. The PSSA currently tests reading, math, and writing abilities and, in fourth and eighth grade, science.

5. You could take part in the 'parental review' process, where public school parents are invited to see the *writing prompt* beforehand to see if they feel it would in some way conflict with their religious beliefs. This type of conflict is one of the only valid reasons a child can be exempted from that section of the test.

6. We highly recommend you take a look at the [Resources](#) link of the [PSSA website](#). This takes you to a page full of links to sample test items for every level of the test. This could be very useful to go over with your child at home, and even to include in their portfolio. This can be helpful even if you don't think you want to take part in the actual PSSA testing, and can help you with those nagging questions of 'am I doing enough?' or 'are my kids measuring up?' You'll be able to gauge if your child is ready for this test or not.

7. Taking the PSSA is FREE for homeschooling families.

8. Your homeschool child's score would not be entered into the local school's scores— they would be handled separately.

5.4 Be Sure to Test Early

If your child is in third, fifth or eighth grade, be sure to test several months before the end of the school year. **Your evaluator will need to see the scores before furnishing you the evaluation letter** and the evaluation letter is due to go to the school district by June 30. Some testing services take weeks to get the scores back to you-- so test early!

6. Evaluations

(i) A teacher or administrator who evaluates a portfolio at the elementary level (grades kindergarten through six) shall have at least two years of experience in grading any of the following subjects: English, to include spelling, reading and writing; arithmetic; science; geography; history of the United States and Pennsylvania; and civics.

(ii) A teacher or administrator who evaluates a portfolio at the secondary level (grades seven through twelve) shall have at least two years of experience in grading any of the following subjects: English, to include language, literature, speech, reading and composition; science, to include biology, chemistry and physics; geography; social studies, to include economics, civics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania; foreign language; and mathematics, to include general mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, calculus and geometry.

(iii) As used in this clause, the term “grading” shall mean evaluation of classwork, homework, quizzes, classwork-based tests and prepared tests related to classwork subject matter.

(2) An annual written evaluation of the student’s educational progress as determined by a licensed clinical or school psychologist or a teacher certified by the Commonwealth or by a nonpublic school teacher or administrator. Any such nonpublic teacher or administrator shall have at least two years of teaching experience in a Pennsylvania public or nonpublic school within the last ten years. Such nonpublic teacher or administrator shall have the required experience at the elementary level to evaluate elementary students or at the secondary level to evaluate secondary students. The certified teacher shall have experience at the elementary level to evaluate elementary students or at the secondary level to evaluate secondary students. The evaluation shall also be based on an interview of the child and a review of the portfolio required in clause (1) and shall certify whether or not an appropriate education is occurring. At the request of the supervisor, persons with other qualifications may conduct the evaluation with the prior consent of the district of residence superintendent. In no event shall the evaluator be the supervisor or their spouse.
—Act 169 of 1988

Perhaps the most confusing aspect of the new law is the complicated qualification listing of the person who you would choose to evaluate your home-education program. This evaluation is one of the main ways that this law protects you from prosecution. The

superintendent is unlikely to challenge the statement made by a professional that an appropriate education is taking place in your home. If he did, then he would have to pay \$3,000 or more to hire an impartial hearing examiner for a due process hearing. This impartial hearing officer would then make a determination of whether an appropriate education was taking place in the home education program. Only three hearings have taken place, to our knowledge, during the first ten years of the home education law.

6.1 Qualifications of Evaluators

The person who is qualified to make this evaluation can be a psychologist, a certified teacher, or a non-public school teacher. Please note that the certified teacher doesn’t need experience in schools within the last ten years. The precise qualifications are:

1. **Any person** with the prior permission of the school superintendent. (This means you can use people who do not have the qualifications listed below if you get the prior permission to use that person from your local school superintendent.)

2. A **licensed clinical psychologist**. The license does not have to be from Pennsylvania.

3. A **licensed school psychologist**. The license does not have to be from Pennsylvania.

4. If your child is in grades one through six, a **non-public school teacher or administrator** with two years experience within the last ten years in a Pennsylvania school at the elementary level in a classroom grading either English, spelling, reading, writing, arithmetic, science, geography, history of the United States and Pennsylvania, or civics.

5. If your child is in grades seven through twelve, a **non-public school teacher or administrator** with two years experience within the last ten years in a Pennsylvania school at the secondary level in a classroom grading English, language, literature, speech, reading, composition, science, biology, chemistry, physics, geography, social studies, economics, civics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania, foreign language, mathematics, algebra, trigonometry, calculus, or geometry.

6. If your child is in grades one through six, a **person with Pennsylvania teacher certification** who has two years experience in elementary school classrooms (not necessarily within the last ten years and not

necessarily in a Pennsylvania school) grading any of the subjects listed in (4).

7. If your child is in grades seven through twelve, a **person with Pennsylvania teacher certification** who has two years experience in secondary school classrooms (not necessarily in the last ten years and not necessarily in a Pennsylvania school) grading any of the subjects listed in (5).

We have a partial listing of PHAA member evaluators listed on our www.phaa.org website, and each issue of the PHAA *Excelsior* contains a list of all PHAA evaluators. Other sources of evaluator listings are your local support group (see our website for a listing of support groups), as many are keeping up to date listings of evaluators in their area. Support group leaders may be able to share with you how families have found different evaluators’ services. Ask homeschooling friends for leads. You could also contact a local public, private, or non-public school and ask if the principal could recommend any teachers who might be interested in working with you privately in this way.

6.2 Choosing an Evaluator

We urge you to choose an evaluator early in the school year so that you can get any specific directions that your evaluator has for keeping your portfolio. Your evaluator may have specific additional requirements that are not stated in the law.

You may find that some evaluators are more compatible with different types of home education programs. For example, some evaluators may be more in-tune with highly structured programs which use textbooks in each subject area, others may lean towards literature-based programs or unit studies, and others may be more in-tune with flexible programs put together by the parents themselves. We urge evaluators to look at each family with a fresh and open mind, and not come to a meeting with a preconceived notion of how the family should be teaching. There are certainly many appropriate ways to help our children become educated young people. Seeking out an appropriate evaluator early in the year will help assure that you find someone who meets your needs.

If your evaluator is a teacher with no experience with home education, you may find that you have to educate him or her about some of the differences between home education and school education. Perhaps our book *The Three R’s at Home*, as well as other books about home education, would be helpful here. Giving a

new evaluator info on downloading this free *Guide to the PA Homeschool Law* would also be a real help.

Your evaluator should certainly agree to testify on your behalf at a due process hearing should the school district superintendent decide that you are not giving your children an appropriate education. Your evaluator's testimony could be vital for you at a hearing.

Most evaluators charge from \$30 to \$75. A few charge more. Expect that a psychologist will probably require a higher fee. Some school districts offer evaluation services for free, but then if the school district evaluator decides that you are not giving your child an appropriate education you will have to enroll your child in school the next year. (If you arrange for private evaluations and your first evaluator decides that you are not giving your child an appropriate education, you can still arrange for a second evaluator and turn in the second evaluation to your school district.)

6.3 Evaluation Procedures

According to the law, your evaluator must interview your child, review your portfolio and certify in a written evaluation whether your child is receiving an appropriate education.

There are no regulations or official standards for how evaluators carry out their evaluation services, and we are encouraging diversity as the best way to meet every family's needs. Different evaluators may emphasize different things. Most will probably need only one meeting with the family, but some may feel more comfortable getting to know the family over the whole year and will want to meet with you several times, or perhaps meet with you at your home.

A few evaluators ask the parents to leave the room when the child is being interviewed, much as parents are told to stay in the waiting room at a dentist's office. When we do evaluations, we always expect the parent to be present during the evaluation interview, especially with elementary age children, as we feel the whole family will probably feel most comfortable and at ease this way. We usually talk extensively with the parent right along with the child, even though it is not strictly required that we "interview" the supervisor. We view the meeting as a chance for the parent to gain feedback about their program, ask questions on approaches and materials, and share concerns and successes — if the parent were excluded from the meeting, this couldn't happen.

Most evaluators will talk informally with the child, flipping through the pages

of the portfolio and discussing what is shown — "Oh! You toured the science museum this year! Could you tell me a bit about it that was special or new to you?" or "Do you remember how you got the idea for this fine story you wrote? I really enjoy it," or "What a quality list of books you've read! Any favorites you'd like to point out to me?"

Some evaluators have each student choose a book beforehand, and be ready to read aloud a favorite paragraph and tell a bit about the book. This is not an oral reading "test," but rather a literature sharing time, to give the evaluator a feel for how the child is responding to books, what types of books are favorites, and to also give us something concrete to talk about. Many children appreciate the chance to prepare for the meeting very concretely by finding a favorite book and scanning back over it to choose a part to read to us.

Some evaluators give short individual achievement tests as part of the evaluation. Some may ask the child to work through a sample math problem or two. Most evaluators base the evaluation upon the material that is already in the portfolio, and their informal discussion of various subjects covered.

6.4 Evaluator's Roles

Over the past years I (Howard) have conducted hundreds of evaluations of homeschooled children each spring. Over that period I have come to see my many roles as an evaluator more clearly:

1. *Audience.* One of my most important roles is audience. It is my job to appreciate the time and effort that went into putting together the portfolio album, to enjoy the children's written compositions and art work, to listen to them play the piano, sing, or dance, to appreciate the children and what they are accomplishing. Many of the children whom I evaluate were excited by the attention that I paid to their compositions and plan to write more and better compositions this year, partly with me in mind as their audience.

2. *Consultant.* Many parents have questions about what is expected at various grade levels, or what materials to use. I answer people's questions as well as I can. Not all of the advice that I have given has been good, but it has been getting better as I have been learning from the people I evaluate.

3. *Standard Setter.* When I find a home education program that is very weak in a major subject, I will often make suggestions that would help the parents address the area of weakness. For secondary school students I often speak to the children directly. Parents often

appreciate that their teenagers hear these standards from someone else. There is usually a certain amount of power sharing between parents and teenagers, and it is not always so easy for parents to get their teenagers to do reading, or math, or writing (depending upon the student).

4. *Portfolio Completeness.* With the portfolio no longer going to the school superintendent, the evaluator is now responsible for making sure everything required is covered, including the log and the test results if the child is in grade 3, 5 or 8.

5. *Judge.* My least often exercised role is judge. If I don't think that a child is getting an appropriate education, it is my legal responsibility to write a negative evaluation letter which states that the child is *not* receiving an appropriate education. I would not want to be held responsible years later should a child sue his parents or a court find a family guilty of educational neglect.

6.5 The Written Evaluation

After your evaluator writes an evaluation of your children's progress and sends it to you, you will send or take it to your superintendent as part of your portfolio at the end of the public school term (see Chapter 4, section 4.3). This evaluation should include three code phrases which comply with the law (X is the name of the child):

1. "X has been receiving instruction in all of the required subjects for the time required by sections 1327 and 1327.1 of the school code." [Note: These two statements are equivalent since Act 169 changed section 1327 of the school code, and added section 1327.1 to the school code.]

2. "X is demonstrating sustained progress in the overall program."

3. "I have reviewed the portfolio and have interviewed X, and I certify that X is receiving an appropriate education."

Keep in mind that there is more than one audience for the evaluation letters. School superintendents will read them. Grandparents will read them. High school level evaluations often become attached to the student's transcript and be read by colleges.

You yourself will also be the audience for your past evaluations. You will likely re-read the previous year's evaluation letters just before you meet with a student as a way of refreshing your memory about a particular student. Also you will be able

to draw from them when you write recommendation letters and if you must testify to defend your certification of appropriate education in court.

Most evaluators write narrative evaluations which go through the subject areas one by one. They try to note excellence, initiative, leadership and extracurricular activities. They also try to include things that the student might have said as a way of demonstrating that they truly interviewed the student, as required by law.

The PHAA diploma program requires that its evaluators write narrative evaluations. Our bylaws state:

In the letters of evaluation which will be attached to the transcripts, evaluators are urged to recognize: (1) high-quality work, (2) service activities, and (3) individual initiative demonstrated by the student. Furthermore, these letters of evaluation must include a substantive narrative containing observations of the specific home education program.

Evaluators who violate this provision shall be prohibited from renewing their PHAA membership.

The evaluator, has many responsibilities, one of which is to furnish the evaluation letter before the June 30 deadline. The next page contains a sample contract between an evaluator and a homeschooling family--this is just a suggestion for how the evaluator and parent can be clear on what is expected, and have all contact info in one place.

Sample Contract between Supervisor and Evaluator

School Year: _____

This contract for one school year is between the supervisor of the home education program and evaluator.

Evaluator agrees to do the following:

1. Provide help and guidance for complying with the home education law as needed.
2. Schedule a time for the interview with children and review of the portfolio between March 1 and June 15.
3. Interview the children and review the portfolio at the evaluator's home unless another location is mutually agreed upon.
4. Send the supervisor a written evaluation including a substantive narrative containing observations of the specific home education program within one month of the date of the interview and before June 30.
5. Conduct additional evaluations at no extra charge if the school superintendent requests an evaluator certification mid-year.
6. Attend and testify for the supervisor at any due process hearing, provided that the supervisor attempts to schedule the hearing at a time which is convenient for evaluator.

Supervisor agrees to do the following:

1. Provide a literate environment in the home with much reading, writing, and/or reading to children.
2. Provide for a balanced program in all curricular areas required.
3. Maintain a log with at least 180 daily entries.
4. Have test scores for a child in grades 3, 5 or 8 already in the portfolio at the time of the interview.
5. Creatively put together an organized portfolio for each child, showing significant samples of work in all areas.
6. Write a parent summary on the child's education on a form provided by evaluator. Bring the summary to the interview with the log and the portfolio.
7. Pay evaluator \$50 per elementary student/ \$55 per high school student for the school year. \$10 per child extra if the evaluation will be away from evaluator's home. The fee should be paid by check at the time the service is contracted and accompanied by the objectives for the child's home education program.

Name of Supervisor _____

Street Address _____ Phone _____ email _____

City _____ State _____ Zip _____ County _____

Name, Age, and Grade of Each Child who shall be evaluated:

Signature of Supervisor _____ Date: _____

Signature of Evaluator _____ Date: _____

Paid amount: _____ Check or money order number: _____

7. Graduation

The following minimum courses in grades nine through twelve are established as a requirement for graduation in a home education program:

- (1) Four years of English.
- (2) Three years of mathematics.
- (3) Three years of science.
- (4) Three years of social studies.
- (5) Two years of arts and humanities.

(d.1) (1) Notwithstanding any provision of this act or any other law or regulation to the contrary, a high school diploma awarded by a supervisor or an approved diploma-granting organization shall be considered as having all the rights and privileges afforded by the Commonwealth, a Commonwealth agency, including, but not limited to, the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency, a political subdivision, a local agency and an authority or instrumentality of the Commonwealth or a political subdivision to a high school diploma awarded under this act, subject to subparagraphs (i) and (ii):

(i) In the case of a diploma awarded by a supervisor the following shall apply:

(A) The student receiving the diploma shall have completed all the requirements in subsection (d) while enrolled in a home education program that is in compliance with this section.

(B) The diploma shall be awarded to the student on a standardized form to be developed by the department and which shall be made available on the department's publicly accessible Internet website.

(C) The diploma shall be signed by the student's twelfth grade evaluator in confirmation of the student's suitability for graduation.

(ii) In the case of a diploma awarded by an approved diploma-granting organization the following shall apply:

(A) The student receiving the diploma shall have completed all the requirements in subsection (d) while enrolled in a home education program that is in compliance with this section.

(B) The diploma shall be awarded to the student on a standardized form to be developed by the organization.

(2) The department shall establish eligibility criteria and an application process for approving diploma-granting organizations to award high school diplomas to students enrolled in home education programs. The department shall maintain a list of approved diploma-granting organizations and post the list on the department's publicly accessible Internet website .(Act 196 of 2014)

7.1 Getting a Diploma

The home education law awards diplomas to home education graduates who complete the graduation requirements while enrolled in a Pennsylvania home education program. Those requirements are shown to the left.

Homeschooling families have two options: (1) the parent issued diploma and (2) the organization issued diploma.

In either case, the diploma will be recognized as a legitimate diploma by the government of Pennsylvania and all of its agencies.

7.2 Parent Issued Diploma

The parent issued diploma is awarded on a form developed by the Pennsylvania Department of Education and [available on its website](#) (pdf). The diploma is only valid if signed by both the parent (the "Supervisor") and the student's senior year evaluator.

The background of any diploma is the high school transcript. It will be up to the parent and evaluator to develop a transcript form that can be sent to employers and colleges as evidence of course completion and, after graduation, as evidence of graduation. The transcripts can be sent out or submitted on line to colleges and employers.

7.3 Organization Diploma

Currently, nine organizations are recognized by the PA Department of Education (PDE) to give diplomas to graduates of Pennsylvania home education program. You can find the up-to-date listing along with contact information for each organization on the [PDE's website](#).

These organizations set standards that go beyond the basic home education law. They also put together the transcripts for the homeschooled student and send those transcripts out when requested by the parent or the student.

They also answer calls from graduation confirming agencies when graduates apply for jobs or promotions. These agencies want to know that the graduate has the legitimate diploma that was claimed on his or her job application.

Also, these organizations maintain records of the graduates into the distant future. These records can reliably prove graduation throughout the student's career.

7.4 The PHAA Diploma

We, Pennsylvania Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency (PHAA), are one of

the organizations recognized by the PDE to provide diplomas to graduates of Pennsylvania home education programs.

We are a non-profit corporation with a board of directors elected by our members (homeschooling parents and evaluators), with graduation ceremonies in both Eastern and Western Pennsylvania.

PDE initially recognized PHAA as an accreditation agency that can accredit homeschool programs under 22 Pa Code § 121.21 which states:

(c) For purposes of the State Higher Education Grant Program, an approved secondary school shall also include any home education program that is accredited by any home schooling accreditation agency approved by the Department of Education....

The compulsory school age in Pennsylvania currently ends at 18. As stated in the compulsory education law itself, those with "a certificate of graduation from a regularly accredited, licensed, registered or approved high school" are exempt from other requirements.

We require that our member evaluators write narrative evaluation letters, and we include those evaluation letters with all of the transcripts that we send, post or email at the parent or student's request, usually to colleges and employers.

PHAA also requires that its students do lots of reading, writing and public speaking, insuring that they are literate and well-prepared for college. As a result, PHAA has an excellent reputation with colleges and employers.

Those interested in finding out about the standards and requirements of the PHAA diploma can download the free [Guide to PA Homeschoolers Diploma](#) (pdf).

In addition to organizing graduation ceremonies, we publish an online student newsletter and hold an annual online-conference. For full information about PHAA, go to our website: www.phaa.org.



8. Taking Part in Extra-Curriculars

(f.1) (1) Beginning January 1, 2006, the school district of residence shall permit a child who is enrolled in a home education program to participate in any activity that is subject to the provisions of Section 511 including, but not limited to, clubs, musical ensembles, athletics and theatrical productions provided that the child:

(i) meets the eligibility criteria, or their equivalent, for participation in the activity that apply to students enrolled in the school district;

(ii) meets the try-out criteria, or their equivalent, for participation in the activity that apply to students enrolled in the school district; and

(iii) complies with all policies, rules and regulations, or their equivalent, of the governing organization of the activity.

(2) For the purposes of this subsection, the school district of residence's program of interscholastic athletics, including varsity sports, shall be considered an activity and shall include all activities related to competitive sports contests, games, events or exhibitions involving individual students or teams of students whenever such activities occur between schools within the school district or between schools outside of the school district.

(3) Where the activity requires completion of a physical examination or medical test as a condition of participation and the school district of residence offers such physical examination or medical test to students enrolled in the school district, the school district shall permit a child who is enrolled in a home education program to access such physical examination or medical test. The school district shall publish the dates and times of such physical examination or medical test in a publication of general circulation in the school district and on its publicly accessible Internet website.

(4) A Board of School Directors may adopt a policy to implement the requirements of this subsection. Such policy shall only apply to participation in activities and shall not conflict with any provisions of this section. (Act 67 of 2005)

8.1 Public School Sports & Activities

In 2006, students in Home Education Programs in Pennsylvania gained the right to take part in any public school extra-curricular activities, including interscholastic sports, based upon passage of Senate Bill 361, shown below. This bill was shepherded through the PA legislature over

many years primarily by homeschool father Peter Hircenko (see his article about the whole legislative process online at newsletter issue # 93 at www.pahomeschoolers.com). While about half of PA school districts had been allowing participation from homeschool students before this law, this new statute mandated that *all* districts must allow homeschoolers to join in sports and other activities, such as school plays, music activities, clubs, and more.

After a number of years of implementation, the new law seems to be working very well. Many more homeschool students are now participating in sports programs, school musicals and plays, academic clubs (such as foreign language clubs), spelling bees, and more. Though many homeschooling families are just too busy to want to add school activities to their schedules, many families have appreciated this opportunity.

Some things to keep in mind if you would like to check out extra-curricular options at your local public school:

1. You will need to contact your school yourself-- do not expect your school to let you know about all the many activities that might be available to your child.

2. Observe all deadlines for participation. Say, your child will not be able to take part in Fall football, if you contact the school in early September-- football participation involves summer practice sessions. For sports programs, you need to allow plenty of time to take the needed physical exams and sign up for try-outs and more.

3. Know that though homeschool students are now allowed to take part, this does not mean that they will be chosen for a competitive team or win the coveted part in the musical. Our students simply have the right to try out for these competitive options.

4. Take involvement seriously and attend all practices and meetings once you decide to get involved. Homeschoolers should not view extra-curricular activities as 'drop in' options that are attended just when convenient. Make a commitment, and show the public school that you can be trusted to follow-through. If you decide to stop an activity, clearly let the appropriate school official know your decision.

Some homeschoolers had been opposed to this legislative change as they worried that the public schools might now ask for

further accountability measures from all homeschoolers. This has clearly *not* happened-- this is simply an option for those homeschool families who feel participation in selected public school extra-curriculars will be a good addition to their programs. Some high school students will now opt to continue with homeschooling through 12th grade, knowing that this decision will still keep sports as a possibility for them.

8.2 Homeschool Extra-Curriculars

Many homeschooling families in Pennsylvania find that there are plenty of excellent extra-curricular activities available within their homeschool groups or the wider community. Homeschool groups have put on major plays and musicals of professional quality in many parts of the state. There are also several sports options within the homeschooling community, with several statewide co-ed volleyball tournaments each year and homeschool basketball is also active in some areas of the state. In some regions there are homeschool band, orchestra, handbell, and chorus programs. Many homeschool groups host spelling bees, geography bees, math contests, chess clubs, and more. There are award-winning homeschool drama productions too!

Further, many families find that their place of worship will offer wonderful opportunities for participating in play productions, art projects, service activities, trips, and youth clubs. Many rise to leadership levels in these groups while still teens. Others find that scouting and 4H programs offer positive outside activities and social options-- and every year we hear of more students earning the Eagle Scout Award or doing exceptionally well at County Fair exhibits. Others find that local community theater is a great resource, introducing their students to caring adults and many opportunities. Homeschoolers have found local karate and other martial arts programs to be a great sports outlet-- complete with competitions if desired. Many take part in private ballet or swing dance classes and clubs

Don't feel that taking part in public school extra-curriculars is your only option-- though it's a wonderful option that works very well for a number of homeschooling families. In Pennsylvania we have a choice on extra-curriculars-- you can decide.

9. Legal Procedures

9.1 What You Do When You Move

In the event the home education program site is relocating to another school district within the Commonwealth during the course of the public school term or prior to the opening of the public school term in the fall, the supervisor of the home education program must apply, by registered mail, thirty (30) days prior to the relocation, to the superintendent of the district in which he or she currently resides, requesting a letter of transfer for the home education program to the district to which the home education program is relocating. The current superintendent of residence must issue the letter of transfer thirty (30) days after receipt of the registered mail request of the home education program supervisor.

(i) If the home education program is not in compliance with the provisions of this section, the superintendent of the current district of residence must inform the home education supervisor and the superintendent of the district to which the home education program is relocating the status of the home education program and the reason for the denial of the letter of transfer.

(ii) If the home education program is in hearing procedures, as contained in this section, the superintendent of the current district of residence must inform the home education supervisor, the assigned hearing examiner and the superintendent of the district to which the home education program is relocating the status of the home education program and the reason for the denial of the letter of transfer.

(3) The letter of transfer, required by clause (2), must be filed by the supervisor of the home education program with the superintendent of the new district of residence. In the case of pending proceedings, the new district of residence superintendent shall continue the home education program until the appeal process is finalized. — Act 169 of 1988

If you are moving to another school district in Pennsylvania, you must ask your school superintendent for a letter of transfer.

9.2 The June 30 Deadline

(h.1) An evaluator's certification stating that an appropriate education is occurring for the school year under review shall be provided by the supervisor to the superintendent of the public school district of residence by June 30 of each year. If the supervisor fails to submit the certification due on June 30 to the superintendent, the

superintendent shall send a letter by certified mail, return receipt requested, to the supervisor of the home education program, stating that the certification is past due and notifying the supervisor to submit the certification within ten (10) days of receipt of the certified letter. If the certification is not submitted within that time, the board of school directors shall provide for a proper hearing in accordance with subsection (k).

Don't miss the June 30 deadline for turning in your evaluation letter. If you do, you will be sent a reminder letter. You will have 10 days after receiving the reminder letter to submit the evaluation letter. If you miss that deadline, you will be taken to a due process hearing and could lose your right to continue to homeschool.

9.3 Midyear Evaluation Requests

(i.1) If the superintendent has a reasonable belief, at any time during the school year, that appropriate education may not be occurring in the home education program, he may submit a letter to the supervisor, by certified mail, return receipt requested, requiring that an evaluation be conducted in accordance with subsection (e)(2) and that an evaluator's certification stating that an appropriate education is occurring for the school year under review, be submitted to the district by the supervisor within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the certified letter. The certified letter shall include the basis for the superintendent's reasonable belief. If the tests, as required in subsection (e)(1), have not been administered at the time of the receipt of the certified letter by the supervisor, the supervisor shall submit the other required documentation to the evaluator and shall submit the test results to the evaluator with the completed documentation at the conclusion of the school year. If the certification is not submitted to the superintendent within thirty (30) days of receipt of the certified letter, the board of school directors shall provide for a proper hearing in accordance with subsection (k).

(j.1) If the superintendent has a reasonable belief that the home education program is out of compliance with any other provisions of this section, the superintendent shall submit a letter to the supervisor by certified mail, return receipt requested, requiring a certification to be submitted within thirty (30) days indicating that the program is in compliance. The certified letter shall include the basis for the superintendent's reasonable belief. If

the certification is not submitted within thirty (30) days of receipt of the certified letter, the board of school directors shall provide for a proper hearing in accordance with subsection (k).

The superintendent can request that you submit an evaluation letter midyear or any other time if he has a reasonable belief that education is not taking place.

9.4 Due Process Hearing & Appeals

(k) If a hearing is required by the provisions of subsection (h.1), (i.1), or (j.1), the board of school directors shall provide for a proper hearing by a duly qualified and impartial hearing examiner within (30) days. The examiner shall render a decision within fifteen (15) days of the hearing except that he may require the establishment of a remedial education plan mutually agreed to by the superintendent and supervisor of the home education program which shall continue the home education program. The decision of the examiner may be appealed by either the supervisor of the home education program or the superintendent to the Secretary of Education, Commonwealth Court or court of common pleas.

(l) If the hearing examiner finds that the evidence does not indicate that appropriate education is taking place in the home education program, the home education program for the child shall be out of compliance with the requirements of this section and section 1327, and the student shall be promptly enrolled in the public school district of residence or a nonpublic school or a licensed private academic school. The home education program may continue during the time of any appeal.

(m) At such time as the child's home education program has been determined to be out of compliance with the provisions of this section and section 1327, the supervisor or spouse of the supervisor of the home education program shall not be eligible to supervise a home education program for that child, as provided for in subsection (b)(1) of this section, for a period of twelve (12) months from the date of such determination.

If your evaluator fails to certify that you are giving your child an appropriate education, you have not completely lost out on your ability to homeschool your children. The school board will schedule a due process hearing within 30 days.

At the hearing, you can be represented by a lawyer. The issue is whether or not you are giving your child an appropriate

education.

The hearing examiner must be an impartial person. After the hearing he can require that you agree with the superintendent to establish a remedial program for the child, he may rule in your favor, or he may rule against you. You can appeal his decision to the Secretary of

Education, Commonwealth Court or the Court of Common Pleas. If the hearing examiner rules against you, you must enroll that child in a school for a full year.

9.5 Child Dependency Prosecution

If child welfare agencies have a reason

to believe that your children are suffering educational neglect, they can take you to court where they can challenge your custody over your own children. At such a hearing, your evaluator could be a witness on your behalf. Narrative evaluation letters, complete portfolios, and good test scores would support your case.

10. Health Services Requirements

A notarized affidavit . . . sets forth . . . evidence that the child has been immunized in accordance with the provisions of section 1303(a) and has received the health and medical services required for students of the child's age or grade level in Article XIV. — Act 169 of 1988

You are required to give your child the health and medical services that are required for students of the child's grade level in Article 14 of the school code. In the notarized affidavit included with this guide (pages 3 and 4) you attested that a comprehensive health record is being maintained for each child. Article 14 section 1402(b) of the school code describes this comprehensive health record:

For each child of school age, a comprehensive health record shall be maintained ... which shall include the results of the tests, measurements and regularly scheduled examinations and special examinations herein specified.

10.1 Checkups at School

This comprehensive health record is a file which must be kept for each of your children. If you don't want to keep it yourself, you can ask your school district to keep it for you.

The Department of Education has asked school districts to cooperate with such requests. In a Basic Education Circular dated March 1989, the Department of Education wrote:

In the Department's view, friendly compliance with the homeschooling law is in the best interest of the children.... Homeschoolers must see that their students receive the same health tests as Article 14 of the School Code requires of public school children. School districts can extend to supervisors of home school programs the opportunity to have home schooled children participate in the district's health program.

In general, you will find the districts very cooperative if you ask them for help with this requirement. They are already set up to provide the services, and they like to know that the services have been done. Having the school keep the Comprehensive Health Folder also makes things easier for everyone if the student later enters school.

So if you want to save the money that would be involved with the medical and dental exams, you just need to ask your school superintendent if your child may

participate in the health services provided free in the public schools. Chances are the school districts will be very happy to comply and will put you in touch with a school nurse at one of the schools in the district. That nurse will then keep your children's comprehensive health records.

If you want to stay with your child during one of the medical examinations at school, you can. It says right in Section 1405 of Article 14 that "Medical examinations shall be made in the presence of the parent or guardian of the child when so requested by the parent or guardian."

10.2 Doing It Yourself

If you decide to keep the comprehensive health records yourself, there are specific requirements for each year. If your child has already been in school, you can start by requesting the comprehensive health record from the school he or she attended. Section 1409 of Article 14 specifies that the school districts must provide you these health records:

School districts, joint school boards or private schools, shall not destroy a child's health record for a period of at least two years after the child ceases to be enrolled, but may surrender such child's health record or portion thereof to his parent or guardian if the child does not reenroll in an elementary or secondary school in Pennsylvania.

Depending upon your child's grade level, there are specific examinations which your child must take:

First year of school: Dental Examination, Color Vision, and Stereo Vision.

First year of school in PA: Medical Examination.

First Grade: Hearing Test.

Second Grade: Hearing Test.

Third Grade: Hearing Test & Dental Examination.

By Fifth Grade: Color vision should be checked at least once.

Sixth Grade: Medical Examination & Scoliosis Test.

Seventh Grade: Hearing Test & Scoliosis Test & Dental Examination.

Eleventh Grade: Medical Examination & Hearing Test.

Just take the medical examination and dental examination forms to your family doctor or dentist when your child goes in for an examination, and then file the examination report in your child's comprehensive health record. Hearing tests

can sometimes be obtained for free from places which sell hearing aids, vision tests from optometrists.

In addition, there are certain **requirements for each year** which you can comply with without going to a doctor, dentist, or school nurse. Every year your child's weight and height need to be measured and your child's near and distance vision needs to be checked. You should use the height and weight to calculate the child's Body Mass Index.

You can get everything needed for health records free online from the PA Dept. of Health's [School Health website](#): then click on [School Health Topics A-Z](#) "School Health Topics A - Z" and then click on [Mandated School Health](#). You'll find everything you need including the forms that you should take with you when you visit a doctor or a dentist.

Check with your local school district whether your student needs a tuberculosis test upon entry to school and again in ninth grade. These are required in only a few districts.

10.3 Religious Exemption

Please note, also, that Article 14 of the school code has a religious exemption. Section 1419 states:

This article shall not be construed to compel any person to submit to any medical or dental examination or treatment under the authority of this act when the person or the parent or guardian of the person, if a minor, objects to the examination or treatment on religious grounds or to permit any discrimination against any person on account of such objections: Provided, That exemption from medical or dental examination shall not be granted if the Secretary of Health finds that facts exist under which the exemption constitutes a present substantial menace to the health of other persons exposed to contact with the unexamined person.

But even if you claim a religious exemption, the screenings (vision, growth and hearing) are still required, because they are neither treatment, nor examination.

So if you object to a physical or dental examination on religious grounds, just write up an objection to the examination on religious grounds which is signed by you as parent or guardian. Your written objection can be put into your child's comprehensive health record.

11. Using Requirements to Gain Perspective

When a newspaper reporter calls, wanting to talk with me about homeschooling for a story he's working on, I can usually guess one question that will come up at some point. We'll have talked about achievement levels, about getting into colleges, about all the advantages of homeschooling. And then it pops out. No, not the socialization question, although that is probably coming too. But it's this one: "I can really tell you know all about the positive side of homeschooling. But you know, there must be a downside to all this too. What do you see as the major shortcomings or disadvantages to homeschooling?"

We all tend to cringe at this one, and it's tempting to say firmly that there simply aren't any problems at all, that's it's all just one wonderful whirl of joyful learning and great kids. But this won't fly—and it won't even be true. I know I have to come up with something... some basic problem that ties together all the problems we may have as homeschoolers.

I've got it. *We sometimes lack perspective.* And that can be a problem.

Sometimes we're doing a super job with our kids, but we worry so incessantly that we can barely enjoy it. We just don't have a way to compare what we are doing to "kids at large" and have no scale to measure if we are doing *enough*. I've seen moms who come in to evaluations at the end of the year and show me that they've had their kids go through three very complete grammar or math programs in one year—they just weren't sure the kids were getting enough with only one of them. Or parents who had the most fabulous program, full of the best books, lots of creative and delightful writing, project work on countries around the world, math club activities complete with original word problems written by the child, hands-on science units carefully documented, marvelous original artwork, music lessons and choir—and they are disappointed after evaluations because I don't tell them where their program was lacking!

Or sometimes we think our kids are doing just fine, when realistically they are a bit behind. Some moms don't know, say, that on 3rd grade achievement tests, kids really are expected to be able to read

extended stories without needing to sound out every little word, that if kids can only read with a great deal of 'help' from mom, and coaching and hints, that they really are still beginning readers, more on the first grade level. I'm not saying here that every 8 or 9 year old should be reading at a strong 3rd grade level, for we all know that some kids find the whole reading task quite challenging and it will take them longer—I'm just saying some moms aren't sure how to even tell if a child is on target or not. Sometimes we just don't know where the target is, or if we even think it's the right target to aim for.

I then hasten to add to the reporter that in PA there are several ways that homeschooling families can gain more perspective. First, there is the portfolio requirement. Sometimes just putting together our child's work for the year in an organized way, helps us see where the holes are—or helps us see that, my goodness, we really *did* do lots of interesting and neat things this year... you know how we all tend to forget what was done even two weeks ago, and think that all days were like the current crummy day where no one was out of pajamas before 10:00am (or was that 2:30pm?). Starting work on your portfolio part way through the year can get you back on track for the rest of the year at times—and your child may gain a bit of perspective also, looking over a span of work.

Then there is the evaluation meeting, where you have a chance to share your child's work and go over it with someone else. Your evaluator can let you know if things do indeed seem on target—this person probably sees lots of children of varying ages and abilities, from all different types of homeschooling or school backgrounds, and you just might feel better getting this perspective. Some parents are very relieved to find out from me that almost *all* elementary kids are pretty bad spellers on their first drafts—or to find that some kids who end up doing super by the end of high school used to have the same problems this young child is having now with figuring out how to spell "with" ("*whith*" is clearly the preferred homeschoolers' spelling...). A good evaluator may share with you ideas gained from meeting with other families that just might work with

your kids, or might suggest other resources that could suit your child's way of going about things better.

And then there is testing. Although I know many families dread it, it can be one more way to gain a bit of perspective. It's never easy to see a low score, but it may help us see in a more objective way how our child is doing compared to others his age. Sometimes it can confirm that, yes, it is important *not* to use grade-level materials with this child, as he clearly is struggling with this level of work and needs more time with simpler materials to gain a strong base. Sometimes the low score may tell us that we need higher goals for the year—it may show that, yes, it really does matter when we don't do math for three weeks, or when we don't ask our kids to read regularly. Or it may indicate that maybe it's just time to try a different approach, as the current one clearly isn't working so well. And of course, you may find that everything is fine and dandy and you can relax and enjoy life and learning.

And finally, and maybe even most important, there's the sharing we do with our homeschooling friends—few of us homeschool all alone anymore. Moms get to talk while the kids are involved with their writing club, or during lunch at the co-op day, or at an evening fellowship meeting where maybe we're gently urged to see the bigger picture once again, gaining needed vision and getting a spiritual lift. There's also lots of email flying between homeschooling moms, and helpful online forums, seeking advice and suggestions and feedback. And when we get together for support group activities we also get to see our kids interacting with the other homeschooled kids, gaining perspective on what children this age are like, what's possible, what's OK. We get spurred on by seeing another child's abilities, and learn to aim higher with our own—or learn to be content with the unique gifts ours were given. We come home from the event feeling we've gained as much as the children—we've gained perspective on who our children are and who we are, and we're ready to face the next day. -- *By Susan Richman*

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