

WESTERN PA. HOME Schoolers

A Network for Sharing Local
Information about Homeschooling

Early Fall, 1985
Editor-Susan Richman

Newsletter
13

WHEW! We've almost reached 300 subscribers now! A warm welcome to all families new to our network and newsletter, and I send a special thank you to GROWING WITHOUT SCHOOLING, John Holt's bi-monthly homeschooling magazine (729 Boylston St., Boston, MA 02116. \$15/year) for putting in such kind words about our newsletter in GWS #45. John Holt has always been personally encouraging of my writing and newsletter work, always an inspiration and a friend. John is right now dealing with a serious recurrence of his cancer, and I know he will appreciate all of your good wishes, prayers, courage and hope.

For PA homeschoolers this is a time for a crash course in effectively influencing our legislators. You all owe it to your children to put out your best effort to secure passage of our Home Education Bill, HB 1478. Your children will see you as willing to work hard to change the world for the better for them, and for all families across PA. They will begin to understand how our state government can respond to people's needs. "Civics" is one of the subject areas we will agree to teach to our children under HB 1478. What better way to begin a study of government and a citizen's role than through actually helping to make a positive law change.

We also welcome with this issue a special section for our children's writings, THE BACKPACK, edited by Madalene Murphy. Just as our newsletter has given so many of you parents a real forum for your personal writing about your children, we hope that many of our children will now feel more welcome to contribute here too. -Susan Richman, ed.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS COOPERATING WITH HOMESCHOOLING FAMILIES IN WESTERN PA.

ALTOONA
APOLLO-RIDGE
ARMSTRONG
BEAVER
CONNEAUT LAKE
CRAWFORD CENTRAL
GRESSON
FAIRVIEW
FOX CHAPEL
HIGHLANDS
JEFFERSON-MORGAN
HOPEWELL
KANE
KISKI
MILLCREEK
MT. LEBANON
MT. UNION
NORTH ALLEGHENY
NORTH HILLS
PENN CREST
PITTSBURGH
QUAKER VALLEY
REDBANK VALLEY
SHALER
SOUTH BUTLER
WOUTH WEST BUTLER
SLIPPERY ROCK
TITUSVILLE
TRINITY
WEST JEFFERSON HILLS
WOODLAND HILLS
YOUGH

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Western PA Homeschooler's
Masthead by Jesse Richman (8)

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The school district news is more of the same. Some are cooperative and somewhat flexible, others are hauling responsible, serious parents into court, even threatening to remove children from the home. Some districts have seemed to be cooperating, but then have pulled the rug on the parents at the last minute, due to mysterious school board rulings made at meetings the parents were never told about. Due process rights are being denied wholesale. It is becoming clearer and clearer how much we need a law change in PA. Here's what you can do:

--MEET with your Representative and Senator. Write follow-up thank you letters showing you appreciated their time and openness to the issue. We aim to have EVERY legislator visited by 5 different families, and receive at least 10 other letters from constituents. Don't feel that just because someone else you know has already visited or written that you don't need to-- numbers count here, numbers of very personal, individual contacts.

--WRITE to Representative JAMES GALLAGHER (democrat) at 1439 Haines Road, Levittown, PA 19057. He is the Chairman of the House Education Committee, where our bill is now. Ask him to hold Public Hearings on Home Education Bill HB 1478, so that we can have a chance to tell our story and demonstrate support for Home Education.

--WRITE to Representative RUTH HARPER (democrat) at 1427 West Erie St., Philadelphia, PA 19140. She is chair of the Basic Education Sub-Committee. She can toss out the bill if she thinks it's unimportant. Again, ask for public hearings on Home Education.

--Another way you can help the legislative effort along is by seeing that PA homeschooling families get good media coverage. Think about calling your local paper, radio or TV station, and offering to help with a feature on homeschooling. Perhaps a local homeschooling support group is having a special gathering-- kids' science fair, writing workshop, nature hike, group field trip, parents meetings. This might be the time to get some positive coverage about it. Might be especially good to show group activities, as folks-at-large always seem to worry that homeschooled children are kept in locked closets all day. Do send on any articles about local homeschoolers, as we are compiling all we can get and sending them on to Jim Gustafson, our Parent Educators of PA Contact in Harrisburg. Merry Dorean sent on a super article from the May 22, 1985 Greene County "Democrat Messenger" that takes a close look at the Walkos and Doreans. The PGH Post Gazette did a feature homeschooling story, interviewing the McMillans, Fredlands, and Richmans. The Kennedys near Erie made the press too. All these good press contacts may be invaluable if these same newspapers cover the story of HB 1478.

House Bill 1478: Our home-education bill has been introduced. It is now HB 1478, a copy of which should be enclosed with this newsletter. The bill has been assigned to the Education Committee of the Pennsylvania House of Representatives. The legislature is recessed until the middle of September but the committee may study the bill in the meantime. It will be brought up for a vote in the Pennsylvania House of Representatives and the Senate either this fall or after the Christmas recess, it depends upon when HB 877 (the Christian School Bill) passes. Representative Pitts, the prime sponsor, and Representative Freind, who is on the House Education Committee, are quite confident of our bill's passage if enough votes can be lined up in the House and Senate. In other words, our bill will become the law if we can line up 102 supporters in the House of Representatives and 26 supporters in the Senate. We already have 25 definite supporters in the House, these are the 25 sponsors. I know of about eight other Representatives who have said that they will support it. We are one third of the way in the House of Representatives.

Legislative Breakfast: Due to the efforts of Tom Eldredge and home-schooling families across the state, we had a very successful legislative breakfast in Harrisburg in May. Forty-five Representatives and ten senators as well as many home-schooling families, including many well behaved children, took part and listened to both Raymond Moore and Sandra Wise, a constitutional lawyer with the William Ball firm. Incidentally, just about enough money was sent by 106 home-schooling families to cover Tom's expenses for the breakfast. After the breakfast we had a short meeting of Parent Educators of Pennsylvania which included all the parents who had come to the breakfast. At that meeting we made several decisions such as, (1) not to accept any amendments to our bill that mandated achievement testing unless parents had a mixed bag of alternatives to choose between, (2) to raise money to support our legislation within the local support groups, and (3) that phone calls on the phone tree to home-schoolers across the state be collect calls whenever possible.

Planning Meeting: On August 3, a planning meeting of Parent Educators of Pa. was held near Harrisburg at which several decisions were made including: (1) To seek good publicity for home-schooling in the next few months and (2) To set up a framework through which responsibility will be divided for contacting legislators so that we can make sure that all the legislators get educated, and that the people in Harrisburg can determine when we have enough votes to pass the bill.

Plan of Action: In this newsletter you will find that 20 different home-schooling families in Western Pa. have agreed to coordinate efforts in their own Senate district and in about 4 House districts. In Eastern Pa., the home-schooling support groups have similarly divided the legislators. Enclosed in this newsletter is a list of people who will serve as coordinators, and also a map showing where the Senate districts are. Please look at the maps, figure out who is coordinating contacts in your area, and please call them and offer your help. Then, write to and visit your representative and senator. Get your friends and/or family to write additional letters. Most legislators won't even know what home-schooling is when you first contact them. You can educate them about home-schooling and ask them to vote for HB 1478. Even legislators who are sponsoring our bill need contacts from home-schoolers in their districts. They need to know more about home-schooling in order to argue effectively for it in the Democratic and Republican caucusses. Ask your legislators to let you know how they will vote as soon as they reach a decision. As soon as your legislator lets you know if he will support HB 1478, call your local coordinator so that we can keep a tally of how many votes we have. According to Representative Pitts, there is a 5-10 rule in politics: A legislator will generally vote for a bill if he receives 5 visits and 10 letters from his constituents. If we all spend a little of our time in the next few months we will have a new home-schooling law within a year.

TIPS ON LETTER WRITING TO LEGISLATORS.....

- 1-FIRST PARAGRAPH-- Specify our Home Education Bill by number-- HB 1478 (the "HB" stands for "House Bill", meaning that the bill was first introduced in the House rather than the Senate).
- 2-SECOND PARAGRAPH- Give personal details about your concern for Home Education Programs, why it's important to you, why a law change is needed. Feel free to relate "horror stories" and any other evidence to support your point of view. You want your letter to be a strong, individual statement, not a voiceless form-letter.
- 3-THIRD PARAGRAPH-- Ask your legislators specific questions so that you receive more than just a form reply. Let him know you will be looking forward to his reply so that you can share it with your friends. Ask him to consider co-sponsoring the bill (it's not to late-- more names can be added).

Additional suggestions.... Type your letter if possible. Neatness and correct spelling and grammar are very important here-- we don't want a negative legislator to hold up shoddily written letters as examples of the types of parents seeking to teach their own children. Good business form recommended. Be sure to identify yourself as a voter. If you voted for the legislator, supported his campaign in any way, let him know it. If his reply does not answer your questions, write back. Many replies read, "Thank you for your views on_____. You can be sure that I will keep them in mind when the bill comes to the floor". If he seems indecisive, offer to give more information so that he can make an informed decision.

Try not to inundate your legislators with too much reading material. These people have desks stacked two feet high with PAPER, and just can't get to it all. They are asked to consider hundreds of issues every week. A one-page letter that is personal, concise, and to the point is better than a ten page ramble. Write again if you have more to share. Continuing contact is the important thing.