PENNSYLVANIA HOMESCHOOLERS

A STATEWIDE NETWORK SHARING INFORMATION ABOUT HOME EDUCATION | Editors: SUSAN & HOWARD RICHMAN

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PA Homeschooled Students Score High!

from Howard Richman, Bill Girten, & Jay Snyder

Here are the results of the testing study that we conducted in the fall of 1989. These results were based upon CTBS/4 standardized achievement tests which *PA Homeschoolers* administered to 174 children at locations sponsored by support groups throughout Pennsylvania. The tests were all administered in a group setting, usually in the Sunday School rooms of a Church. All test administration was closely supervised by either Dr. Howard Richman or Susan Richman, Pennsylvania certified teachers. The test results were matched with surveys that 76% of the parents filled in while their children were taking the tests. Three test results were eliminated from consideration because the wrong test level was administered.

The home educated students scored very well. In statistics there is a term called the "median" which roughly means "middle". The median score falls exactly in the middle because half the scores are lower, and half are higher.

When the CTBS test was normed, it was given to school students. Half of them scored above the 50th percentile and half scored below the 50th percentile (that's how the 50th percentile was calculated).

When the same test was given by us to 171 homeschooled students, the homeschooled students scored much higher. The middle reading score was the 89th percentile, and the middle math score was the 72nd percentile. These scores were far higher than the 50th percentile which is the school median, and higher than median scores that were reported for homeschoolers from Washington state in 1986 (about the 65th percentile in reading and the 55th percentile in math.)

Since science and social studies tests are optional in Pennsylvania, only 81% of the students took these sections. These scores were also quite high. The middle science score was the 87th percentile, and the middle social studies score was the 81st percentile.

It is difficult to determine why the homeschoolers in Pennsylvania scored so much higher than the homeschoolers in the state of Washington. The families in both samples had about the same income levels (median income about $32,500 per year) and the parents had about the same amount of schooling (median educational level of the parents was about 2 years of college). The tests were even administered in similar settings. The main difference was that the Pennsylvania students took the CTBS test in the fall while the Washington students took the Stanford Test in the spring.

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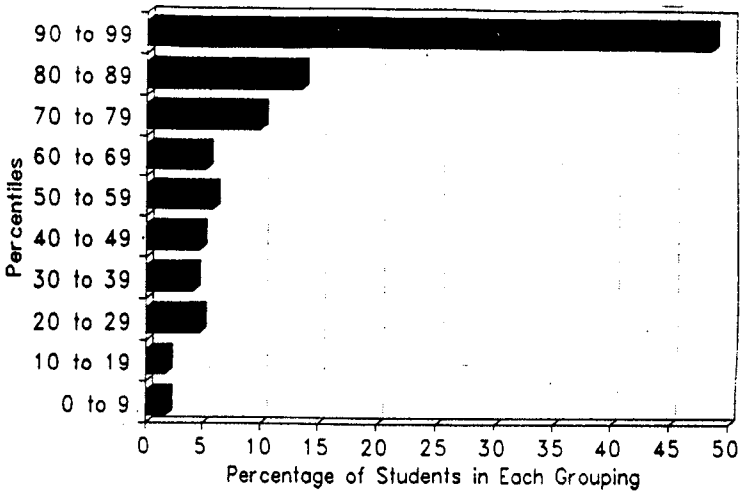

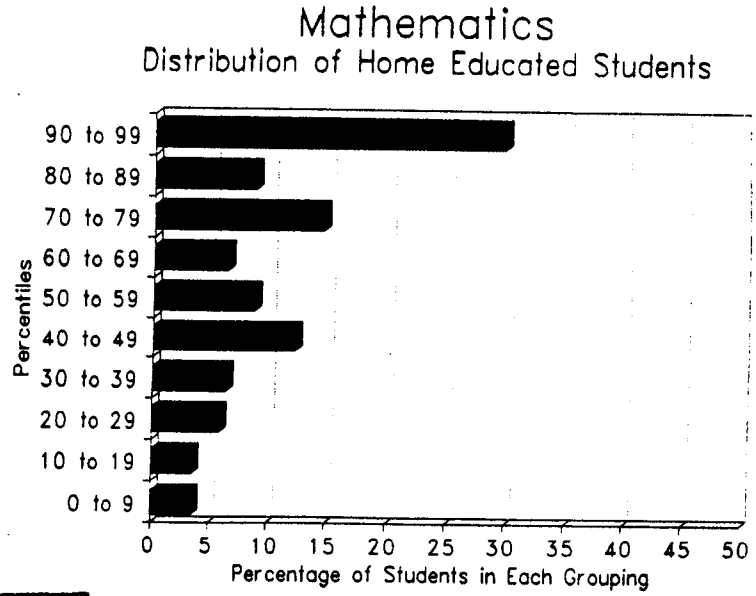

PA Homeschoolers masthead hand lettered by Jesse Richman, age 13.

(Testing High / Richman et.al.)

Hours per Week in Formal Instruction

When parents were asked, "About how many *hours per week* does this student spend doing 'formal schooling' (structured lessons that were preplanned by either the parent or a provider of educational materials)?" The parents responded with an average of about 16 hours per week, the same average that was reported by parents in Washington State. At the third grade level the average was 15 hours per week. It rose to 16 hours per week in fifth grade and about 20 hours per week in 8th grade. If your superintendent tries to tell you that you are not spending enough time in formal instruction, you might want to show him how well homeschoolers do when they only spend an average of 16 hours per week in formal instruction.

Comparison with TELLS

The Pennsylvania Department of Education reports that 278 home-educated students participated in the TELLS test which was given for free to home-educated students in Pennsylvania public schools in March 1990. Like the CTBS this test met the requirement for testing of 3rd, 5th, and 8th graders in the Pennsylvania law.

The average reading scores for home-educated students were slightly higher than the scores of the school-educated students, but the average scores in math were slightly lower than the average scores of school-educated students.

With both the TELLS test and the CTBS test, home-educated students scored better in reading than in math. On the other hand, it appears that home-educated students who took the TELLS test scored much worse than home-educated students who took the CTBS test. There are several possible reasons:

1. Home-educated students who took the TELLS test may, on average, have been from lower-income families than the home-educated students who took the CTBS test since there was a $20 charge to take the CTBS, but the TELLS was free.

2. Teachers in public schools may teach the TELLS objectives more directly than homeschooling parents since public school teachers have better access to these objectives, and are urged to teach to them by their supervisors.

3. Home-educated students may test better in the fall, than in the spring, when compared with school-educated students, because more home-educated students continue to engage in educational activities during the summer.

4. Home-educated students may have felt more comfortable taking the CTBS test with a group of their peers than taking the TELLS test with a group of school students.

5. There may be two groups of home educated students, (1) those who are in contact with the *PA Homeschoolers* support network, and (2) those who get their information about homeschooling from their school districts. Those in the support network are more likely to take our tests, and those who get their information from public school employees are more likely to take their tests. People in our support network (and we include here all of the support groups who sponsored our tests) may get more input about alternative approaches, and may have more friendly people to turn to when they have problems.

The whole truth may be a combination of some of these reasons, and may include other reasons that we have not considered.

This Year's Study

This fall we are doing our testing again. Since it appears that mathematics may be an area of weakness in some home education programs, we are going to try to find out what makes for a good homeschooling math program through this year's parent questionnaire.●

Amendment to Early Intervention Bill

from Howard Richman

In response to President Bush's goal that all children come to school ready to learn by the year 2,000, state legislatures across the country have been enacting "early intervention" bills to provide pre-school services for "at risk" preschool children. Pennsylvania is no exception. Our early intervention bill is House Bill 1861.

These bills are not controversial with state legislators. The biggest stumbling block is the price tag, not the principle. Everybody wants to help "at risk" children overcome their handicaps before they enter school. House Bill 1861 has strong bipartisan support including sponsors who have strong records of support for family rights.

As written, these bills make services available to handicapped preschool children and their families. The programs provided by these bills are meant to be voluntary. The problem is that families may be forced to continue to participate in these programs even if they decide that they no longer need the services, and even when the family does not share the child-raising philosophy of the people who run the programs.

According to the Home School Legal Defense Association, who brought this bill to our attention, parents in Missouri have been charged with neglect for failing to follow the advice of the "experts" in a similar "voluntary" program.

In order to avoid such problems in Pennsylvania, several pro-family lobbies have agreed to support an amendment to the bill which will be proposed when House Bill 1861 reaches the House floor for a vote this fall. This pro-family amendment is a simple statement of parental rights which is based upon a similar statement which is already part of Pennsylvania's school code. Our amendment is short but sweet. It 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 an eligible child, to choose whether such child or family participate or continue to participate in any such services.

Section 1327 (the compulsory education section) of the school code contains the similar statement of parental rights. It 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.

We are just asking the legislators to reaffirm the same principle that they have already affirmed in the past.

Nothing in our amendment conflicts with the intent of the bill which is to make new services available, not compulsory. Many Representatives may think that our amendment is unnecessary or superfluous. Nevertheless, please ask your legislator to commit himself to support it so as to avoid future misinterpretations of the intent of the legislature.

If we are able to get this simple amendment into House Bill 1861, we may be able to save some parents of handicapped preschoolers from losing their control over the education of their children.

The Pennsylvania legislature must pass this bill by November 30th or they will lose federal money, so you must act right away. This bill will probably be voted on soon. (cont. next page→)