



Masthead by Hannah Richman - age 5

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

Will OBE Affect Homeschoolers?

from Howard Richman

Periodically, the Pennsylvania Department of Education comes out with its new objectives for public school students in Pennsylvania. The current objectives (called OBE for Outcomes Based Education) were scheduled to be approved by the State Board of Education in March, 1992, but passage was delayed until January due to controversy about "politically correct" values contained in some of the objectives and doubts about whether the objectives would enhance education in Pennsylvania or hurt it.

The battle over the objectives is not yet over. The state House and Senate can still stop them. Even if the objectives pass at the state level, each local school district will have public meetings for putting together its own specific interpretation of the OBE objectives. Those who wish to get involved may still have time to do so. For your own free copy of the objectives write to the State Board of Education (First Floor, 333 Market St., Harrisburg PA 17126) and ask for the Student Learning Outcomes. For information about opposing OBE write to the Pennsylvania Coalition for Academic Excellence, PO Box 567, Harrisburg, PA 17108-0567 or call 1-900-226-7366 (Citizens for Excellence in Education hotline, \$2.97/3 min.).

In the meantime homeschoolers wonder whether the objectives will affect us. Unsubstantiated rumors

have swept the homeschooling community. I have checked out these rumors whenever possible.

For example, on January 13th, I got a call from a homeschooling mother who said that she had just talked to the principal of a Christian School who in turn had been told by the chief legal counsel at the Department of Education that OBE would be required of homeschoolers. The homeschooler gave me the principal's number, so I called the principal.

The principal told me that she had talked to an underling in the office of private schools, and her phone call had nothing to do with the Chief

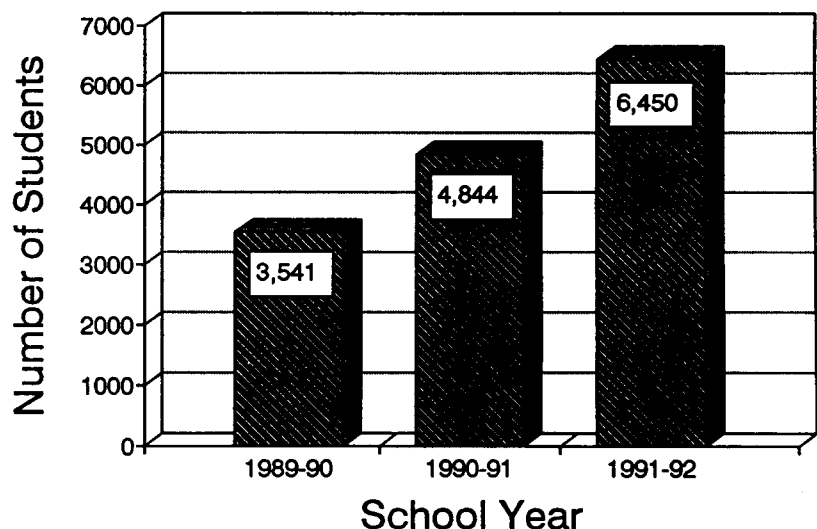
Counsel at the Department of Education at all. So I called the underling.

She was very nice. She usually fields questions about non-public schools, and in the course of a conversation with the principal of a non-public school she had supposed that OBE would affect homeschoolers. She admitted to me that she did not really know anything about the homeschooling law. She was amused at the extent the rumor mill had built up her position at the Department of Education.

After investigating such rumors, reading everything I can find about OBE, and talking to many people

More Homeschooled Students in PA!

According to PA Dept of Ed. Statistics



about OBE, I have concluded that OBE will have little impact upon homeschoolers. I have five reasons:

1. **We Write Our Own Objectives.** Our homeschool law specifies that we write our own objectives for our home education programs, and those objectives cannot be rejected. Some vague homeschooling laws in other states hold that home school curriculum must be "equivalent" to public school curriculum, but not Pennsylvania.

2. **We Have a Choice of Tests.** Some people worry that "politically correct" attitudes will be enforced through the Department of Education test which replaces the TELLS test. The homeschooling law specifies that homeschoolers do not have to take the Department of Education's tests. Our children can take almost any standardized achievement instead, and the Department of Education must maintain a list of at least five standardized tests which are acceptable. Just as our children did not have to take the TELLS test, they won't have to take any new test that the Department of Education comes up with.

3. **Our Graduation Requirements Won't Change.** The most revolutionary part of OBE replaces the "seat time" definition of the requirements for high school graduation with accomplishment of a set of outcomes. Our homeschooling law still lists "seat time" as the requirement for graduation (4 years of English, 3 years of math, and so on). Furthermore, homeschoolers' organizations give, and set standards for, diplomas in Pennsylvania. The standards for the *PA Homeschoolers* diploma can only be changed by a 3/4ths vote of the members of the *PA Homeschoolers Accreditation Agency*. Unless homeschoolers vote to change our requirements, they won't change.

4. **Teacher and Parent is the Same Person.** The main objection that most people have to OBE is that it permits teachers to teach children values which differ from their parents' values. In homeschooling, that is just not a problem since the teacher and the parent are the same person. In most homeschools, the teachers are already teaching values!

5. **OBE is Aimed at Public Schools.** The Pennsylvania State Board of Education governs public education, not private education. For example, the first version of the new Department of Education test (replacing the TELLS test) is not even being made available to private educators such as homeschoolers. It is being used for getting group scores for each school district, and individual pupil scores are not even reported. Furthermore, as Susan noted in issue #38 of this newsletter, Robert Feir, Executive Director of the State Board of Education, told her directly that OBE would not apply to homeschoolers.

OBE will Affect Some Homeschoolers. On the other hand, homeschoolers who plan to put their children into public schools will be affected by OBE. Their children might be retained if they have not yet completed the outcomes required of public school students and may be advanced ahead if they are ahead on outcomes. Also there are a few school districts that offer their diplomas to homeschoolers. It is likely that OBE will change the requirements for those diplomas.

Inge Cannon's Assessment

I am not the only one to conclude that homeschoolers are not at immediate risk from OBE. In a December 1992 special report, Inge P. Cannon, Associate Director of the National Center for Home Education noted that OBE is being proposed or implemented in some form in 31 states and is aimed at reforming public education, not homeschools.

Although she criticizes OBE's cost and the inclusion of goals that call for "politically correct" responses, she goes on to argue that homeschoolers are only vulnerable in states which either (1) tie homeschoolers in with the state curriculum through "equivalency" requirements, (2) require that homeschooled children take state-designed tests, (3) require approval of homeschool curriculum, textbooks, methods and/or goals, or (4) mandate matching OBE goals as a requirement for high school graduation. None of these currently apply in Pennsylvania.

In Sum

Our homeschooling law (Act 169 of 1988) is the longest homeschooling law in the country for a good reason: the Pennsylvania legislators and their staff people who wrote it don't like to leave anything to the interpretation of the Pennsylvania Department of Education. Our law pretty much ties homeschoolers into education as it was in the year 1988.

For example, even though the Department of Education's switched the testing years of their 1992-1993 test to fifth, eighth and eleventh grades, we still continue to test in the testing years of their old test -- third, fifth and eighth grades. Even though they are getting away from seat time requirements for high school graduation, our law still specifies four years of English, three years of math and so on. No matter what changes occur in philosophy at the PA Department of Education, homeschoolers are insulated.

There is no movement afoot in Pennsylvania to change our law. The Department of Education and the Pennsylvania legislators do not want to bring homeschoolers to the Capitol again. We have a reputation in Harrisburg based on our lobbying for Act 169 of 1988. They say we came to the Capitol and didn't leave until we got what we wanted.

It is possible that in the future we ourselves will want to change our home education law. Until that happens, we are insulated from the changes taking place in public education in Pennsylvania. ●

Bills Die in Committee

Every two years, the members of the Pennsylvania House and Senate are elected anew and all of the old bills that were not passed die. During the last session there were two bills that were opposed by many homeschoolers in Pennsylvania. Both bills died in committee. House Bill 1695, which would have lowered the beginning compulsory school age from 8 to 6, died in the Appropriations Committee. House Bill 2558, which would have eliminated the religious and philosophical exemption from immunizing children, died in the Education committee. ●