

# School Sports in Play

from Susan Richman

[This article was from Issue 57 (Winter 1996-1997) of the *PA Homeschoolers* newsletter

We are hearing from many families across the state about the new homeschool policies being discussed and voted on in school board meetings. Often the impetus for coming up with a policy is a request from a homeschooling family to take part in public school sports or music programs, or other extra-curriculars, such as the story shared by Ingrid Wakeman in the Easton area on the next page. We know this is a controversial area for homeschoolers in PA-- many families feel that the very last thing they want to do is participate in something offered by the public schools, while others feel it is a real positive to have the option to join in these sorts of programs.

Many students across PA have already participated in school bands, chorus, sports teams, drivers education, and occasionally lab science classes. One thing that has struck me is that, to the best of my knowledge, no district has ever decided to reverse an inclusive policy because of unsolvable problems that arose as homeschoolers began taking part. Some parents have found that part-time school attendance or participation in extra-curriculars made their children want to attend school fulltime-- an unforeseen "problem" on their part! Many families feel much more comfortable finding community options for enrichment activities through their support groups, scouting, or private sports programs.

Even if a family is not personally interested in participating in extra-curriculars for their own family, it is still an important thing to be aware of what your school board is deciding in these new policies. Board members often discuss other areas of homeschooling, and make policies on these points also, such as how to deal with homeschoolers who return to public school full time. This is an especially hard one for districts to decide on at the high school level when credits are at issue-- should they accept homeschoolers credits? By what procedure? Sometimes very restrictive policies stating that credit will only be offered if the student takes and passes any and all exams and tests given in the same course at the local high school, something that is clearly not a very good yardstick to use, especially for a student who has followed a different course of instruction at home. Sometimes districts grapple with the idea of issuing diplomas from their school district to homeschool graduates, something that currently only a small handful of districts have chosen to do.

Occasionally districts have come up with specific guidelines for the end of year portfolio check-- when and how should portfolios be turned in, can parents make personal appointments or just drop the portfolios off at the district office or can they choose whichever they prefer? How long should districts keep portfolios for review? This has been a particularly hot topic in many districts, where parents have complained about a superintendent or designee keeping the portfolios well into the fall months. At least one district has made a specific policy that states that the portfolios will be returned within two weeks. Wouldn't we all like that policy!

So get involved when you hear that your district is discussing a homeschool policy. You may think it will have nothing to do with you, but it very well may. And you may be able to have

a positive impact on the outcome, too. These meetings can sometimes come up very abruptly, and often the most important thing is for homeschoolers to slow down the decision-making process until board members have all the information they need.