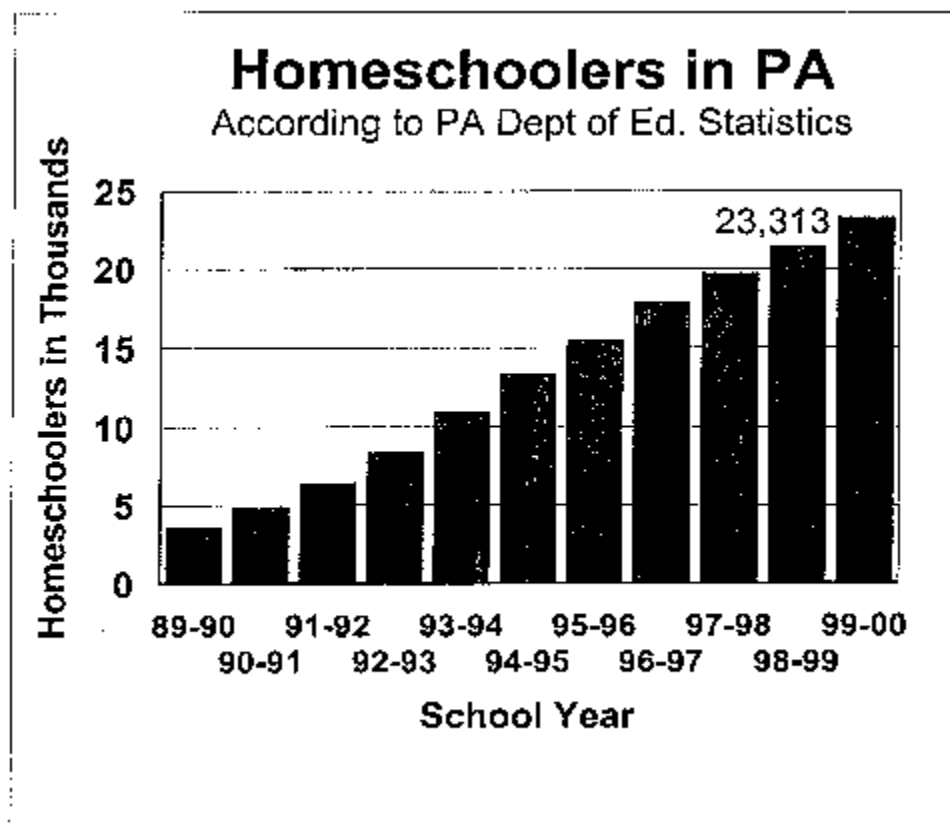


Homeschool Population up again in PA!

from Howard Richman

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According to statistics just released by the [Pennsylvania Department of Education](#), the number of homeschooled children in Pennsylvania was up, during the 1999-2000 school year, to 23,313 students from 21,459 students the previous year. For ten years, the number of homeschooled students in Pennsylvania has risen by about 2,000 per year in Pennsylvania as shown on the graph in the middle of this page.

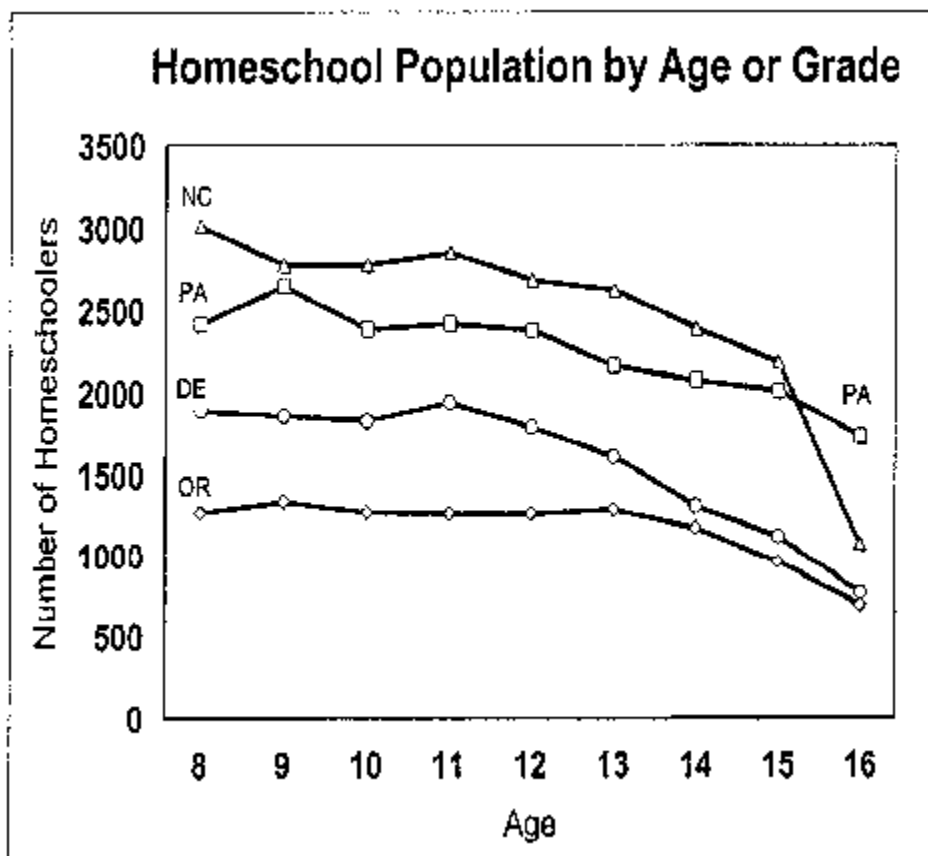


These statistics do not include all of those being homeschooled in Pennsylvania, just those currently complying with Pennsylvania's home education law. Not included are the many 6- and 7-year-olds whose parents don't begin to comply with the home education law until their children turn 8 (Pennsylvania's beginning compulsory school age), those taught at home by a Pennsylvania certified teacher under Pennsylvania's private tutoring law, and those taught at home but enrolled in a private school.

Beginning with the 2000-2001 school year, homeschoolers have yet another option, the Western Pennsylvania Cyber Charter School. It will be interesting to see what effect this public homeschooling option will have upon private homeschooling numbers in PA.

Number of Students by Age Levels

The Department of Education also released statistics of homeschooled students in PA by age level. I recently scoured the Internet for such statistics from other states but only found them for [North Carolina](#), and [Oregon](#). I also called the Departments of Education in neighboring states and got similar statistics for Delaware. The graph in the bottom right corner of this page shows how PA numbers by age compare with those of the other states. Except for Delaware, it shows the number of students at each age level who were being home-schooled according to the most recent statistics. (The Delaware statistics are actually the number of homeschoolers, multiplied by ten, in each grade level with third grade corresponding to age 8. I multiplied the Delaware numbers by ten so that the trend would be observable on the graph.)



PA appears to be different from the other states that are shown on the graph. Instead of the number of home-schoolers falling off sharply at ages 15 and 16, PA numbers stay right up there. From age 14 to 15, the number of homeschoolers declines by just 3% in PA, but at the higher rates of 9% in NC and 18% in OR. Similarly, from age 15 to 16 the number of homeschoolers declines by 14% in PA but at the higher rates of 29% in OR and 51% in NC. There is clearly a slower drop-off in rates of homeschooling at upper age levels in PA than in the other states for which statistics are available.

The numbers of homeschoolers in North Carolina fall off rapidly at 16 partly because their compulsory school age is 16 (Pennsylvania's is 17). But that doesn't explain the drop-off at 16 in Oregon whose compulsory school age is 18! It also does not explain the drop-off in the other states at age 15.

The Delaware numbers may not be indicating what is truly happening in that state. Homeschoolers who enroll their children in the satellite option of a Delaware-based private school would not be included, and many do so specifically to get a high school diploma. In fact, homeschoolers have founded private schools in Delaware in order to provide their children with legitimate homeschool diplomas.

Throughout the country home-schoolers have several graduation options including high school graduation by taking college courses (in PA you can get a Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma by completing 30 college credits), parent-issued diplomas, the GED, diplomas from supervising private schools, diplomas from public schools, and diplomas from national correspondence schools such as American School, Keystone National High School, Clonlara, and Seton Home Study. Sometimes diplomas issued by parents or by correspondence schools are not recognized by educational authorities.

Only in Pennsylvania and South Carolina can homeschoolers also get diplomas from homeschool organizations which are in-turn recognized by their state's departments of education. In letters to the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency and to Penn State University, the Pennsylvania Department of Education has recognized the diplomas of homeschool organizations as being the substantial equivalent of a public high school diploma, meeting criteria that require a high school diploma or its equivalent.

There are now seven homeschool organizations that are recognized to give diplomas by the PA Department of Education. (For the current list, see page 28.) Together they awarded 646 diplomas to homeschoolers in Pennsylvania last year. (PHAA gave 467, Erie gave 75, Buxmont gave 60, Home School Academy gave 27, Mason Dixon gave 11, and Aleithia gave 6.) They also organized activities for high school level homeschoolers.

These organizations give home-schoolers a wide variety of choices for high school at home. That range is exemplified by the two very different organizations that were added last year to the list maintained by the Department of Education. One, *Home School Academy*, encourages students to use the Alpha Omega School of Tomorrow correspondence school curriculum. The other, *Susquehanna Valley Homeschool Diploma Programs*, was set up partly to provide a flexible alternative for the vocationally-minded homeschooler who did not plan to go to college.

History of Homeschool Diplomas in PA

Congressman Joe Pitts deserves much of the credit for this diploma option. Back in 1985 when Pennsylvania was prosecuting more homeschoolers than any other state, he, then a Representative in Harrisburg, introduced a homeschooling bill designed to end those prosecutions. Little noticed by those of us who lobbied hard for that bill and its successors, he included a passage in the bill that specified requirements for high school graduation from a home education program. That provision, though never discussed, was carried on in each successive homeschool bill. Just before passage at the end of 1988, the Department

of Education took the graduation requirements out (in the Appropriations Committee) but we were able to put them back in (just before final passage on the House Floor).

After the bill passed, the Department of Education sent out a "Basic Education Circular" to explain the new home education law to the school districts. In that circular they said that school districts didn't have to give diplomas to homeschoolers, but they did not specify who would give the diplomas. So, a few months after the law passed, I wrote to Joseph Bard, the homeschool liaison at the Department of Education, and asked which of three alternatives he favored:

1. School districts must award high school diplomas to home educated students who meet the graduation requirements, *or*
2. The Department of Education must create a new regulation which awards the Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma to applicants who have successfully met the requirements for high school graduation in home education programs, *or*
3. Supervisors of home education programs may give their students high school diplomas which are officially recognized by the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

He replied:

As regards your suggested solutions to the diploma problem: I believe your second suggestion of the Department creating a new regulation to award the Commonwealth diploma to applicants who have successfully completed a home education program has the most merit.

Unfortunately, none of your suggestions can come to fruition without considerable time and effort. This is something to discuss.

On Sept. 22, 1990, I wrote a carefully crafted letter with input from 70 support group leaders, including those of the Pennsylvania Home Education Network, that was designed to get the Department to award their Commonwealth Secondary School Diploma to homeschool graduates, while not precluding any other diploma options (such as correspondence school diplomas or diplomas awarded by parents to their children).

And on Sept 27, 1990, the Pennsylvania Home Education Network folks wrote a letter to the Department of Education arguing that the Department of Education should not award diplomas to homeschoolers but should instead regulate evaluators! It is possible that this letter convinced the Department that they didn't want to touch the idea of awarding diplomas with a ten foot pole!

The Department of Education then extricated themselves from the trap by declaring that home education organizations should award the diplomas, because as the new Chief of the Division of Advisory Services wrote on October 2, 1990:

It seems more appropriate to me to have the credential for home schoolers issued by a home schoolers organization. The monitoring and evaluation could then be done by individuals familiar with those programs and the quality control could be enforced by those individuals who have a vested interest in maintaining that quality.

I was thrilled with that response. It meant that they were going to let the home education community stand on its own two feet. It meant that homeschoolers would have many choices of diploma standards, not just an arbitrary standard set by the government. In response to that letter I immediately started PHAA, the first of the current seven diploma programs.

When I lobbied for the home education law from 1984 to 1988, I thought that the future of home education in Pennsylvania was on the line. But within a few years, every state in the nation had virtually stopped prosecuting homeschoolers. On the other hand, when we in Pennsylvania passed a provision that recognized graduation from a home education program, we accomplished something which, 11 years after the passage of the PA Home Education Law, still has Pennsylvania ahead of most other states. As the steadily increasing numbers of homeschoolers in the state of Pennsylvania show, homeschooling is alive, well, and growing in PA, and may be a bit healthier at the high school level than many other states.