

Thoughts on HB 2560

from Jean Snyder

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Enjoyed reading your last issue of Pennsylvania Homeschoolers, in particular Howard's report of the meeting on June 13th and Susan's Reflections on Evaluations and the Law. Jay and I decided not to attend the hearing on the 13th. We didn't have strong opinions on this issue. This is strange for two very opinionated people but I'll try to explain why. We can see both positions, in some ways we agree with both and in some ways we don't know what to believe. We didn't like the idea of wearing either red or blue - a sort of taking sides on an issue. We considered wearing green and also wearing yellow for caution. But Jay and I did not have a strong desire to be present at the meeting either.

We figured we'd learn through reports about what was going on, and your newsletter arrived first - as of yet neither CHAP or CHALC has issued newsletters since the meeting. But we've been thinking some of these things through and would like to share some of our thoughts. Jay's thoughts are filtered through me but I'll try to represent them as he would. Philosophically Jay believes that parents should be in charge of their children's education and the new law puts parents in the drivers seat. But Jay also believes in accountability and the new law doesn't work that into the plan. An HSLDA representative told Jay that the homeschoolers' church should make the family accountable. Great idea, but will the churches do this? No, they don't have that vision. And what about those without a church affiliation? Support groups could fill this bill, but would they want to do that and would some just chose to go solo?

And as Susan, we too see some hidden benefits of the law. We have never found the log keeping to be a burden. When I kept these records, I found the process to be rewarding, it reinforced for me that I truly was doing my job in teaching. It was a way of me SEEING what I was doing. Later as the children became older, this task was given to them. This helped my children to become responsible in this area. They have found this to be burdensome at times, but they needed this to realize that record keeping is a part of life.

And putting the portfolios together has been a joy too. It was fun to represent our years work and reviewing it was rewarding too. Again it helped us to reflect on what we had done. And if we had to scrape to get enough to represent one area of study, it told us we needed to pay more attention to that area next year or find a better way to show what we learned. Our children have wonderful scrapbooks for each year of their studies. There are records of field trips, their compositions, some photographs, 4-H projects, plays attended or acted in, etc. Julie has referred to these portfolios when she filled out job applications to help her remember when this or that took place.

We never dreaded evaluations but looked forward to them. Howard was always very positive and encouraging to both us as parents and to our children. We always left feeling good about what we had done. And then again, Howard was always helpful in giving us direction for our next year. We'd discuss our plans or ask for an idea for a subject or way to teach that subject. I only remember one time I left an evaluation feeling discouraged. That was the year Howard suggested I not use 'Writing Road to Reading' again for Justin. He

could see that it wasn't working for him and I was frustrated not knowing how to teach him to read. But I'm glad he told me that - for this led me to getting Justin evaluated for learning disabilities and started using Stevensons and vision therapy to help him.

Yes, an evaluator becomes a consultant. If the new law does pass, I would suggest that evaluators become consultants. I'm not sure if most parents would see the need for this service at first. But I think after one evaluator-less year, they just might. There will be a gap. And there will be questions and the need for individual guidance. Without being the purpose of the evaluator, this was a role it provided.

As far as parental freedom and the current PA Homeschool Law, there is much freedom for the parent. First, it is the parent who chooses the evaluator. The parent, not the school district hires this evaluator. Mom and Dad chooses the one who will evaluate their child/children. And if the parent/parents do not like the evaluator's report, they can ignore it and get another evaluator and use that report in its place. I don't know of anyone who has done this, but it could be done. That is much control on the part of the parent as far as evaluators go. And if the parent does not agree with turning in medical info, he/she can file a form stating an objection to it as provided in the regular school law and just include this in the portfolio. That's parental choice. The parent writes his/her own objectives. Objectives are not dictated to the parent. And the parent can adapt these objectives as the year progresses and change these as needed. Objectives cannot be rejected by the superintendent. The parent is the one in control of deciding how the list of subjects are taught. Religious textbooks may be used and the Bible may be one of them. No authority objects to this. All textbooks can be used or no textbooks can be used. The parent can choose a layed-out curriculum or create his/her own curriculum. For the years where testing is required, the parent has a choice of many (don't remember the number) recognized tests to be given. He even chooses who administers this test and in what setting it is given. And if the child scores poorly, to my knowledge, no one is refused to continue to homeschool due to that. If a school official questions that education is taking place in the home school, it is the responsibility of the school official to prove this [at a due process hearing, paid for by the school district]. A parent is not immediately asked to quit. So it is in the hands of the official to incriminate, protecting the parent from abuse of the official's opinion concerning homeschooling.

Having schooled prior to this law, I appreciate the lack of home school visits and being required to show red marks in my child's workbooks and worksheets. This awkward intrusion just does not happen anymore. With two children graduated from homeschool and two years and three years left for my other two children to graduate I can sincerely say that this current law has not been a burden to us. We have made the law meet our needs. Those portfolios are for us, the logs are for us and the evaluations are for our benefit. These tasks are undertaken not only because they are required by the law but as an aid to us as we homeschool.

But not all homeschoolers have the same views. Many deeply resent the paperwork and the time it takes them to do all of the above. To them I would say, "You need to make it work for you. Find a way to streamline this work. Look at the benefits these disciplines bring to you and your children." Record keeping is part of our lives. We keep records for taxes and for our bank accounts. Transcripts are kept of our school records. Some home insurances keep records of items in the home. There are credit records and wills. So, maybe

instead of fighting record keeping, we should accept it. It takes time, but who are we keeping these records for? Maybe if we realized that records can assist us, it would prove to be worthwhile after all.

One other thing I'd like to add. Howard, I think you should be complemented on your answer to the question put to you at the meeting regarding if you personally benefit financially from the current law. You answered the question honestly and straight forwardly without excuse or explanation. That shows integrity to me. You did not look at implications behind the question but just answered it. Of course you get compensated by money for your work. Who among us works for 40 + hours and does not get compensated for it? (homeschool mom, huh?) Someone in the household needs to bring home the pay check and you are caring for the needs of your family by doing so. But you are fulfilling a need. I once heard Larry Burket, a well-known Christian financial advisor, speak on his call-in radio program to someone asking about starting a home business. His advice was to find a need and fill it. This is simple business sense and more than that it is filling a real need, being of service to others and because the service is being sought others are willing to pay for that service. I have no doubt that if evaluators and diplomas are eliminated in PA, you would find some other area of need to be of service to the homeschooling community. I know that your first consideration is how you can be of service versus how you can make money. I know this because I have been on the receiving end of your services. I've seen your serving spirit.

And I remember a time when you served without compensation. I am putting a memory album together, thus going through old photo albums. Great memories have surfaced as I taped photos of homeschooling camping at the Richman Farm many, many years ago. We were all so new to homeschooling and being invited to spend 2 days together and to learn from one another was wonderful! Thank you for opening your home and your farm to us in those very early days. You two were of great assistance and encouragement to us.

Some must feel that you have a conflict of interest regarding your desire in rejecting the proposed House Bill 2560. This may be so. It would be difficult to distinguish. But I know the two of you and I know your characters. You would not support or reject anything if you did not believe in it or against it. You truly believe that HB2560 is not in the best interest of homeschoolers. And you are willing to speak out about it. It is difficult for me to understand that others do not see that. But these people do not know you personally, they have not been recipients of your services and they do not know your heart. On behalf of homeschoolers of Pennsylvania, Jay, Jean, Julie, Justin, James and Jared Snyder would like to thank you. You have been a servant to the homeschoolers of Pennsylvania.

Jay and Jean Snyder are homeschooling parents of four and former members of the Board of Directors of Christian Homeschoolers Association of Pennsylvania (CHAP), one of the groups that is promoting HB 2560 [Read more about HB 2560](#)