

Governor Rendell's Remarks

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Today I am pleased to sign legislation that ensures homeschool students of this state can participate in extracurricular activities offered by the school districts where they live.

This is a bill that helps the children of our Commonwealth and I am pleased that the legislature, in the face of other critical debates, acted and this made it to my desk. Nearly 25,000 students in this state are taught in their homes by dedicated parents and relatives. While I have long been an advocate of public education and the need to ensure a world-class public education system in our state, I think the commitment to education demonstrated by homeschool parents has too long been undervalued.

As Senate Bill 361 worked its way through the legislature, I asked my staff to review such critical questions as the financial implications of the bill, whether it imposes any new financial burdens and whether such burdens could be met with current resources. I also asked that we consider the appropriateness of state legislation given the local control structure of Pennsylvania's school system.

This thorough review process gave me an opportunity to understand the personal circumstances and the goals of the homeschool parents and their children. I read of Barry Clay's desire for his children to participate with their friends in extracurricular activities in the Carlisle Area School District; of Carol Loys' hope that her children could do the same with their friends in the West Shore School District; and of Beverly Wieszorek's efforts to convince the Pittsburgh School District to let her son, Wesley, play football. These were just a few examples that illustrated the pleas of parents, asking that their children be able to enjoy the benefit of extra-curricular sports, the opportunity to compete for college sports scholarships and the ability to participate in and contribute to their communities.

I found it disheartening that 221 of our school districts do not permit homeschool children to engage in school sports, plays, clubs or other programs that promote good social values, integrate our communities and clearly contribute to the positive social development of our children. I agree with these dedicated parents that they have every right to be frustrated. As any good parent would, they are looking out for the interests of their children. And not

only are they involved in their child's education, they share in their local school's cost by paying property taxes. It seems disingenuous to suggest that permitting these students to take part in school-based extra curricular activities would be unjust or a burden on public school budgets since their parents are paying property taxes.

It's clear that parents who homeschool their children do not make this decision lightly. Some do so because they want their child's education to be integrated with their faith and do not have access to a private school that reflects their religious beliefs. Others choose homeschooling in an effort to offer more challenging coursework to children who have advanced beyond the available curricula offered locally. Others may have a child with special needs and opt for homeschooling as a way to provide individualized attention that may be unavailable or impractical for their school district. These parents make tough choices, rearranging their lives entirely around the needs of their children. These parents deserve our respect and their children are entitled to be included in the activities of their school districts.

As I sign this bill into law today, every Pennsylvanian can be proud that we are protecting the rights of parents to educate their children as they wish and that we are guaranteeing a place for those who make "different" choices in the everyday benefits of community life.