

**This information was prepared by Ohio Home Education Coalition, an open and inclusive coalition of interested homeschoolers who come together to raise awareness of issues facing homeschoolers in Ohio. This is not an interactive email address. As we are all busy with our families, individual responses to this fact sheet would be impossible.**

**If a homeschooler you know would like to receive OHEC alerts, please have them send an email to [OHEC1@earthlink.net](mailto:OHEC1@earthlink.net) stating in the subject: "Add my name" and provide a full name and email address. If you are no longer interested in receiving OHEC fact sheets, please send an email to the OHEC address and state in the subject line "Remove my name."**

**OHEC supports the We Stand For Homeschooling Statement and Resolution at [www.westandforhomeschooling.org](http://www.westandforhomeschooling.org)**

#### OHEC RESPONDS TO OHIO NEWSPAPER SERIES ON HOMESCHOOLING December, 2004

Recently, the *Akron Beacon Journal* printed the series which many Ohio homeschoolers were aware was coming. What we didn't know was how misinformed and misleading the series would be on the subject of homeschooling. It is especially perplexing to OHEC that the writers--as they prepared this 7-day series which included an estimated 50,000 words--chose to virtually ignore the long-documented history of homeschooling success. Specifically, they ignored an extensive compilation of homeschooling resources and prior research citations (those citations in other well-recognized news organizations) that OHEC had prepared on the subject of homeschooling and had sent to the writers over one year ago.

Rather than focus on the vast majority of families who have made homeschooling a successful educational option for hundreds of thousand of children, the writers made comparatively minimal reference to those families. Instead, a substantial amount of the coverage focused on a small minority of troubled families, including those in extremist fringe movements, making sensational connections between homeschooling and criminal behavior.

Rather than fully examining the extensive diversity which exists in homeschooling--and always has--the writers chose to focus a significant amount of narrow reporting on homeschoolers called by personal religious conviction and on one national organization with a limited membership in homeschooling.

Rather than utilize the many and diverse resources in authors, publishers and homeschooling advocates which OHEC provided in our "Selected Current Citations to Inform Research on the Subject of Homeschooling" (October, 2003), the writers virtually ignored that eight pages of resources. We have surveyed many of those individuals we

named in the material and find that no contact was made with all but seemingly one.

(The only exception OHEC can find in ABJ's printed report was interview excerpts with one Columbus author, more than likely due to her participation in a homeschooling conference and her sensational views on homeschooling, rather than being named in OHEC's Citations document. The author was cited in the report as connecting homeschooling to extremists, racists, and "nut jobs," and for being "the rare home-schooling parent who believes that government should be more involved in monitoring families," according to the ABJ writers' statement on her position.)

Rather than initially approaching a variety of homeschoolers around the state seeking interviews as journalists preparing to extensively research homeschooling--a courtesy OHEC believes would have been afforded of most every other education professional, legislator or probably any other group we might name--the writers first chose a very small group of homeschoolers and held a group interview. Later, the writers set up anonymous "focus groups," inviting participants, grouping individuals into predetermined, narrow stereotypes of the writers' choosing. The focus groups were facilitated by a market researcher and were videotaped for the ABJ writers' private viewing and repeated distillation back at the office.

Rather than examining the long-documented history of compliance failures by some Ohio superintendents and other school administrators when it comes to the administrative laws governing homeschooling (see previous OHEC fact sheet regarding "Homeschooling Notification" at <http://www.homeschoolfreedom.org/ohec.shtml>), superintendents are cited as implied credible experts throughout the seven days of the ABJ reports. There are at least 12 separate superintendents quoted and many, many anonymous implications written by the reporters on what superintendents and school officials "believe" or "say."

Rather than offer an evenhanded understanding of the validity of homeschoolers' personal stories, homeschoolers are assailed several times throughout the series for "anecdotal evidence" on the success of homeschooling. Yet, in each of the quotes and beliefs attributed to school superintendents, nothing more than anecdotal evidence is offered. It appears that the ABJ accepts anecdotes as fact from some, but questions anecdotes from others. It smacks of guilty until proven innocent, unless you are a public official. It also refutes hundreds of others in the journalism profession who have written widely about the "anecdotal" success of homeschooling for many, many years in communities across the country.

In short, as an OHEC co-coordinator states in a November 21 letter to the editor which the ABJ has not printed:

*Despite the thousands of words used to assail homeschoolers throughout your seven-day series, the truth of homeschooling was stated by your very words in the first article "From [homeschooling] parents' viewpoint, they can give their children individual attention, teach to strengths and address weaknesses, set the pace for learning and spend more time with their children. Most do."*

## What we can do

-- We can remember that homeschooling works! We can look to all the encouragement we as families receive from relatives, friends and community members as they come to know our family and our reasons for homeschooling.

-- We can read the articles written by the *Akron Beacon Journal* for this series at [http://www.ohio.com/mld/ohio/news/special\\_packages/home\\_schooling/](http://www.ohio.com/mld/ohio/news/special_packages/home_schooling/) (registration required for free at their website) Be aware that the online version may not reflect the impact that the print versions held, from November 14 to November 20. For example, only a small sample of the 75 photographs used in the printed series are available online. Many of those photographs spanned the entire page. ( On the most sensational day of coverage, one particularly disturbing large photograph required an ABJ photographer to lay prone on children' s graves for an upwards shot of a headstone.)

-- We can use critical thinking to discern the unfounded themes used to attack homeschooling which are evident in the series. This is a particular challenge due to the length of each day' s coverage and the clear intent to sensationalize both homeschooling itself and subjects which the newspaper erroneously links to homeschooling. For example, child abuse is not a homeschooling issue but a troubling societal issue that will not be solved by initiatives to regulate all homeschoolers. Abusive parents are criminals who are already defying existing laws.

-- If we choose, we can write to the Editor of the *Akron Beacon Journal* to challenge some key piece of misinformation based on known facts about homeschooling law or facts that can be substantiated by the many reports of success in homeschooling or our own personal experience. We can take care to not play into a trap of justifying academic success by promoting test scores ("If you justify homeschooling success with test scores, why would you object to mandated testing?"). In an era of mandatory, multi-level testing of most other children, including private school, charter school and public school enrollees, many do not understand the problems and injustices inherent to testing and would champion rationales to include all children, including homeschoolers.

-- Another place to use critical thinking skills and prepare your response carefully is on any concept of the ownership of children. Many would rightfully argue that owning any other human being is both morally wrong and was eliminated by the Fourteenth Amendment. As families, we can own *the responsibility and the decision* to educate our children in accordance with our principals and beliefs without advocating for owning children themselves. Many newspaper readers in the community would help to support homeschooling based on the rights of families to claim ownership of these responsibilities, rather than mistaken claims to own the people most affected by these decisions. Potential homeschooling allies with various viewpoints could advocate that the rights of responsible people to make private decisions regarding choices, such as educational choices, supersedes the rights of the state or others to make these decisions for families. This is especially supported since homeschoolers receive no funding from

state or federal governments.

-- We can remember that as grassroots advocates for homeschooling, we cannot "out-word" the unequal advantage evidenced by the power of a local daily newspaper owned by a giant conglomerate (Knight-Ridder). We can remember that the media in general is becoming more and more mistrusted by members of the public, and that just because a person read it in a newspaper does not mean that she or he supports the statements made. The ABJ' s advantage in corporate media opportunity can be clearly countered by the hundreds of thousands of successful homeschoolers across the country, who are living productive, creative, beneficial and interesting lives day by day. Many know homeschoolers in local communities and these people often provide very favorable reports about their experiences with our families. Community supporters of homeschooling can be encouraged to write to the ABJ and other media concerns detailing their personal encounters.

-- We can write to or visit our legislators, both the members of the Ohio House and Ohio Senate, to introduce ourselves, to discuss our experiences in homeschooling, and to request that we be kept informed on any initiative to further regulate homeschooling. (Find legislative addresses and phone numbers by beginning at <http://www.legislature.state.oh.us/>) We can be aware that a new group of legislators will be seated in January 2005, and they will be anxious to meet constituents as they assume their new duties.

-- We can continue to discuss all the many issues facing homeschoolers to help preserve our freedoms, both for the present and for future homeschoolers. It may be especially helpful when long-time homeschoolers share the stories of the early days of homeschooling, how hard some of the battles were to preserve this right and what the sacrifices were to insure this right. With the support of OHEC, several homeschooling activists are meeting regularly in Ohio in study groups to specifically discuss materials written regarding the preservation of homeschooling freedoms.

Finally, attached to this email are two documents. The first is OHEC' s "Selected Current Citations to Inform Research on the Subject of Homeschooling" (October, 2003). This was sent to the reporters last fall and was additionally sent to every member of the Ohio House and Senate. We have also attached a November 21 letter to the editor written by a co-coordinator of OHEC. As of today, the ABJ has not chosen to publish the letter and we wanted those interested in OHEC to have a copy.

If you cannot open the attachments, you can find them at <http://www.homeschoolfreedom.org/ohec.shtml>