
OHIO HOME EDUCATION COALITION

Home Education in Ohio: New Arm of Public Education?

September, 2003

Background: In previous fact sheets, OHEC has written of the dangers to homeschooling freedom presented by the confusion between home education and enrollment in schools—and the resulting accountability for public funding, as any public school is required. It is very important for Ohio homeschoolers to understand the need to continue to distance home education—as described in ORC 3301-34 since 1989—from the many programs looking to profit from the good reputation we have earned.

This fact sheet will cite current commentary on homeschooling, and closely related issues, from several sources:

- ⊞ Speeches and interviews delivered by those who have achieved powerful positions in Washington (who clearly stand to benefit from the reputation of homeschooling becoming identified as public school.)
- ⊞ Comments from a participant in an on-line discussion group, a group that is potentially generated, read and/or used by those who wish to capture homeschooling under the umbrella of state control.
- ⊞ Media from around the country

As we did earlier this summer, we strongly encourage homeschoolers and their allies to read the We Stand For Homeschooling Statement and Resolution at www.westandforhomeschooling.org and to consider joining the thousands who have signed that statement. We believe that the Statement and Resolution make a powerful case for the distinction of homeschooling.

Are homeschoolers to be part of the system?

The title of the most recent massive education reform legislation is No Child Left Behind. Does this truly mean “no child,” including homeschoolers, despite the lack of public funding, despite long-term independence from the public education system? Are we as homeschoolers ultimately and ironically to be casualties of an initiative to implement a “seamless society” of control that begins at birth?

Are homeschoolers the “first to go?” Despite all the success stories of young people who found homeschooling to be the ideal solution to an education system which could not expand to their needs? Very often those system failings were directly due to the interferences of the so-called education reform movement. Many of the tenets of that movement have much to do with one-size-fits all standards,

endless testing and an entrepreneurial model applied to education. For many homeschoolers, those tenets define the exact opposite reasons they choose homeschooling.

As we consider a potential loss to educational freedom for our children, examine the comments of Rod Paige, Secretary of Education in a recent interview with Judy Woodruff for CNN regarding the implementation of NCLB:

Woodruff: ...it is the case that **the president is putting some more money into private schools which will not be held at the same accountability standards**, is that correct? [Emphasis added]

Paige: Well, first of all, I think **we make too big an issue of the clear line between what is public and what is private. The deadline [sic] is much more blurred than it is clear.** [Emphasis

added] And what we're interested is in whatever delivery system provides the best education for our children.

We realize that there will be **multiple systems** as we go forward. **There'll be cyber schools, home schooling, private schools, what we refer to now as the public schooling...**[Emphasis added]¹

Ask yourself these questions. Have you previously considered homeschooling to be a part of "the system?" If you are a homeschooler, have you appreciated the fact that there was a very clear line between your family's private education in homeschooling and public education, as opposed to Mr. Paige's "blurring" of that line?

Further, can we understand why other non-homeschooling taxpayers and government officials may believe it is necessary to measure anyone receiving funding by "the same accountability standards" for those tax dollars? High-stakes testing? Teacher certification? Special education requirements? Facilities inspections? Regulatory control of a homeschool from agencies even beyond education agencies?

In fact, many both in home education and in traditional public education, believe that the "standards and accountability movement" contributes to the very reason why public education treats children like products instead of individuals with distinct learning styles, beliefs, and needs. For many of us, isn't homeschooling the antithesis to those education controls—the essence of why we sought something dif-

ferent for our children? Do homeschoolers see any advantage to being captured into that system?

Do those in power see any advantages here? Is there a high-profit potential? Is a computer and packaged, generic curriculum an equal trade for independence? Will homeschoolers really be able to continue home educating in accordance with an individual family's principals

and beliefs if they become one of the "multiple systems?"

Education discussions by high-level policy-makers

The Milken Institute may be one of the "think tanks" to examine in any discussion of planned education reforms. They hold annual global conferences as described here:

Each year, we host the Global Conference, which

attracts more than 1,500 leading businesspeople and policy makers from around the globe. The Global Conference is widely known for the high quality and acumen of its speakers combined with networking opportunities at the highest echelons.²

At the global conference each year, a panel presentation is held on K-12 education. This year's speakers included Eugene Hickok, Undersecretary of Education, who is credited with shepherding No Child Left Behind through the legislature. The panel also included William Bennett and superintendents from three large urban school districts. A synopsis of the presentation at the conference website includes these items of consensus among the presenters: "Future success will include both reform in the schools and reform in

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-Milken Institute
2003 Global Conference

¹ 'Paige: 'We think that we're on a roll.'"

CNN.com/Inside Politics, June 10, 2003. Accessed September 19, 2003.
<<http://www.cnn.com/2003/ALLPOLITICS/06/10/cnna.paige/index.html>>

² Milken Institute: About Us. *Milken Institute*. Accessed September 19, 2003.

<<http://www.milkeninstitute.org/about/about taf>>

the home,” and later “... the panelists affirmed that ‘you cannot solve the K-12 problem until you solve the 0-5 problem.’”³

In his address⁴, Hickok breathlessly described a futuristic scene 30 years hence where children work at computers in their homes, with curriculum supplied by a feed from a second state and teacher oversight from a third state, completely eliminating not only local control of education but even state boundaries. Consequently, education will be federalized entirely in cyber-space.

Not possible? Consider the very recent remarks of John Bailey, director of educational technology at the U.S. Department of Education, as reported by ABC News:

‘Most state legislations envision where [virtual schooling] could be this fluid mess,’ says Bailey. ‘What happens when a student in Nebraska can register in a [virtual] school in Pennsylvania that is taught by teachers in Florida? What are the standards is that student responsible for [sic]? Who pays for it? These are the interesting questions that are being raised.’⁵

Policy-makers are among us?

In previous fact sheets, OHEC has described in detail the explosive trend of cyber education via enrollment in a charter school. (Several of those fact sheets are available at <http://www.homeschoolfreedom.org/>) That trend is ever-growing here in Ohio, including the operation of at least five state-wide cyber charter schools and at least eleven local school district-based counterparts. More are coming.

³ ‘K-12 Education: The Cornerstone of Our Future.’ Global Conference 2003, *Milken Institute*, April 2, 2003. Accessed September 19, 2003. <http://www.milkeninstitute.org/events/events taf?function=show&cat=allconf&EventID=GC03&level1=program&level2=agenda&EvID=264&ID=26>

⁴ Ibid. Audio Recording.

⁵ Paul Eng, ‘Virtual School Daze: Online Tech Offers New Choices in Education.’ *ABC News*, September 16, 2003. Accessed September 19, 2003. <http://abcnews.go.com/sections/scitech/FutureTech/virtualschools030916.html>

With that existing base, it is projected that the state will turn over at least \$50.8 million to cyber charter schools in this school year.⁶

William Bennett’s K-12, Inc., a cyber charter school operator in Ohio and other states stands to reap the benefits of taxpayer-funded, government-accountable schools. As cited in a report from the *Wausau Daily Herald*: ‘Enrollment in Bennett’s program, K12, will almost double this fall, to 13,000 kids in 13 states, said Tom Boysen, a senior vice president at the company and former Kentucky commissioner of education.’⁷ The report also tells us that in many states, virtual charter schools receive as much as \$5,000 in public money for each child. Therefore, around the country, Bennett’s operation stands to receive at least \$65 million this school year.

Bennett is becoming a popular speaking choice by the Milken Institute for its Global Conferences. The chairman of the Milken Institute is Michael Milken, who was convicted in 1990 after pleading guilty to six counts of securities fraud. Milken provided \$10 million start-up funding for K12. Bennett appeared as a presenter at Global Conference education forums in both 2002 and 2003.

In 2002, his goal was to promote K-12, Inc. Despite never having been previously involved in the homeschooling community, Bennett made at least two astounding pronouncements about homeschooling in his remarks, including two claims that homeschoolers have ‘come to some consensus’ about curriculum and what to teach.⁸

⁶ ‘Community School Funding Report F2004 (Compiled). *Ohio Department of Education*, September 1, 2003. Accessed September 19, 2003. http://webapp1.ode.state.oh.us/school_options/F2004/Default.asp

⁷ ‘More kids skip bus, fire up PC.’ *Wausau Daily Herald*, August 21, 2003. Accessed September 19, 2003. <http://www.wausaudailyherald.com/wdhlocal/287124107399525.shtml>

⁸ ‘Early Childcare and K-12 Education.’ Audio Recording. Global Conference 2002, *Milken Institute*. April 23, 2002. Accessed September 19, 2003.

And after extolling the virtues of K-12, Inc. students and the required “constant” assessment,” Bennett later stated:

Interestingly, a lot of the homeschoolers initially resisted testing, and some still do. They don’t want anything to do with any testing. They don’t want anything to do with any government entities at all. But more and more homeschoolers are confident of testing because their kids shine and whatever people’s ideology, when their kids shine, they tend to be in favor of whatever it is that shows their kid shining, and angels or whatever. And that’s the way parents are.⁹

With that one sweeping statement, Bennett boils down the entire homeschooling community into two seeming factions: anti-government extremists or shallow parents living vicariously through their angelic children. Neither is a correct or fair representation of homeschoolers. And many homeschoolers have stood staunchly opposed to standardized testing. Yet, Bennett makes this statement to those in the “highest echelons” of policy-making and capitalism.

“Newcomers” call for the demise of homeschooling independence

Confusion continues to surface regarding the clear distinction between homeschoolers (those complying with ORC 3301-34 and remaining independent of taxpayer funding) and public school-enrolled students (described by the operators themselves as public school—including cyber public schools.) Contributing to that false impression are those who claim to be both homeschoolers and enrolled as publicly funded school students. Some have formed various discussion groups in on-line networks.

One such group posted the below opinion. The author provides no evidence of “extensive re-

search” on homeschooling, on variations of learning styles, on the movement to oppose standardized testing in both the school community and homeschool community. Further, the author completely fails to understand elementary concepts about the meaning of homeschooling, evidenced in hundreds of personal stories, books and journals published for over 20 years.

Moreover, the author has no knowledge concerning what homeschoolers have worked to preserve in Ohio for 14 years since the regulations were written in 1989—the “primary right of parents to provide the education for their child(ren).”

Instead, the author merely posts an uninformed opinion. This opinion comes from someone who might self-describe as a member of the homeschooling community in Ohio. The old adage applies: With “friends” like this, who needs enemies?

You know what, I have looked at the guidelines for homeschooling in this state and what is required. Personally, I too believe that there should be more accountability of the homeschooling community. In my eyes, through all of my extensive research I have run across many different forms of homeschooling and many different thoughts on homeschooling. Personally, I don’t feel that a 25% on a standardized test is “good enough” to say that you are doing better than the school districts. Homeschooling has been around for many years and just recently has had a boom in the amount of kids entering homeschooling and virtual schools. Some of what I have seen is people protecting their rights to keep their kids uneducated. In addition to this, there are many people that seek out professionals for evaluations [sic] that are geared towards the “type” of education that they are seeking. What good are those parents doing for those children is my question.

<http://www.milkeninstitute.org/events/events.taf?function=show&cat=allconf&EventID=gc02&level1=program&level2=agenda&EvID=36&ID=2>

⁹ Ibid.

Why does the homeschooling community fear taking standardized tests and why do they continue to protect their rights to be uneducated?¹⁰

No, opposing standardized tests is not a matter of fear, but of principle. Many beyond the homeschooling community are working every day to oppose standardized tests. In growing numbers, teachers, parents and students understand the futility of narrowly defining one's education via test scores. Even education bureaucracies are opposing the treadmill testing requirements of NCLB, albeit some of that opposition at times comes from lack of federal funding for mandates from Washington.

(Note: If a homeschooling family chooses to privately test their children, that is a different matter, one to be decided privately by that family in accordance with their principles and beliefs. OHEC would support that family's right to that decision.)

Additionally, statistical information at state Department of Education websites is beginning to reveal that despite claims that homeschooling is growing by huge numbers, there is no such "boom" in those entering homeschooling. If there is a "boom" in those entering publicly-funded cyber charter schools, that clearly is a function of the novelty of that type of school and has nothing to do with homeschooling.

Despite some peoples' insistence to simultaneously identify enrolled students as homeschoolers many have never come from homeschooling to enroll in public cyber school. Even the head of eCOT, the first and largest cyber school in Ohio, states "...that only 10 percent of eCOT's enrollment comes from traditional home schools and that is primarily in the elementary grades."¹¹

¹⁰ Author unknown. Neon Homeschooling. Accessed August 31, 2003.

<<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/neonhomeschooling/>>

¹¹ Glenn Cook, "The Cyber Charter Challenge," *American School Board Journal*, September, 2002. Accessed

What does "accountability" look like?

To some, "accountability" today looks the way it has looked for a long time...only much, much more of it. A trip through the website of the Ohio Department of Education¹² speaks loudly. It is filled with the buzz-words of a bureaucracy-gone-zealous on the trends in "education reform." Words like "model curriculum," "academic content standards," "aligned assessments," and "continuous improvement of products and practices supporting standards-based education."

Standards define "what all Ohio students should know and be able to do at each grade level." Assessment has expanded in number, grade levels and type, with the coming diagnostic tests, achievement tests, and Ohio graduation tests, all required by law.

The Office of Accountability develops report cards to analyze the school, pointing out where the school is succeeding and where it can improve. The goal of this department is to "expand and improve the reporting of results and progress to the public."

There are literally thousands of laws, regulations and policies that govern education in federal, state and local mandates.

And then, there is homeschooling—where instead of this bottomless capacity for red tape, families are living, learning and growing together successfully.

Sadly, homeschoolers have been working so hard in freedom with our children, defying this constant measurement and achieving success without it, that we now may be first in the sights of those who believe in Eugene Hickock's vision of futuristic education. And we are profitable to some and are typecast as willing participants—even as we continue to be mistrusted for what we do.

September 19, 2003.

<<http://www.asbj.com/2002/09/0902inprint.html>>

¹² Ohio Department of Education. Accessed September 19, 2003.

<<http://www.ode.state.oh.us/>>

What We Can Do?

We can continue living and loving with our families, the essence of what makes homeschooling work.

We can read and consider signing We Stand For Homeschooling Statement and Resolution at <http://www.westandforhomeschooling.org> We can encourage our families, friends and allies to do the same. One need not be a homeschooler to appreciate the problem and be interested in standing with us.

We can diligently work to correct people's assumptions that homeschooling is enrollment or that enrollment is better for homeschoolers. This includes writing thoughtful letters to editors when we read reports that contributes to the confusion, as well as politely correcting those whom we meet when they perpetuate these assumptions.

We can be very conscious of any attempt to characterize homeschooling in a negative way and work to correct those mischaracterizations. We can tell our family's stories of success. We can insist that homeschooling should not be "lumped in" with: negative concepts about parenting; anti-government extremism; testing and standards; abuse of children; enrollment in schools with questionable business practices; attacks by those who believe we take money from schools or believe their tax dollars sup-

port us; or any other concept which is untrue of homeschooling.

We can work to strengthen local support groups by holding regular meetings, sharing our successes with other homeschoolers, and informing them of the concerns in this current time. We can remember that strong support groups have always been and continue to be a basis for preserving our freedom to homeschool. We can invite "seasoned" homeschoolers to relate their experiences with homeschooling, especially those who faced some of the early challenges or personally know others who did.

We can write to companies and school districts that solicit us for enrollment or services and insist that they remove our names from their mailing lists for such solicitations. This is a matter of privacy. To many homeschoolers, it is the equivalent of telemarketing calls and unsolicited junk mail.

We can make an introduction to our district legislators and present a positive image in their minds regarding homeschooling. If the need would ever arise, a legislator would know that there were homeschoolers in her or his district who they can turn to for information and advice on any initiative. We could use that same introduction to draw that clear distinction between enrollment and homeschooling.

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.