

# **PRESERVING HOMESCHOOLING RIGHTS**

*by Amy Grant*

Thanks to the efforts of pioneering homeschoolers of the 1960's and 70's, homeschooling is now legal throughout the United States. Homeschooling is regulated independently by each state, so the level of regulation varies dramatically from state to state, but families in every state enjoy the right to homeschool. Given that, you might expect homeschoolers to sit back, relax, and go on their merry homeschooling way. That, however, is not the case. As more families leave schools, and as homeschooling becomes more visible, there is increasing pressure to bring homeschooling under greater government control, and homeschoolers can be expected to respond to that threat.

## ***Interests Threatened***

For every family that chooses to walk a different educational path, fewer students will fill the classrooms, which translates into smaller school budgets, less need for administrators at every level, and (ultimately) fewer schools. Fewer schools will mean fewer unionized teaching positions, less money for textbook and test publishers, and fewer students for commercial after-school tutoring services. If you listen carefully you will discover that it is the professional educators, administrators, and unions (with deep vested economic interests in the existing public school system) who are loudly proclaiming the dangers of homeschooling.

## ***Need for Choices***

Pantyhose manufacturers seem to have discovered what public school apologists have not—one size simply doesn't fit all. Each child has a unique developmental timetable. Some develop reading skills early and are ready to progress quickly, while others may have an early innate understanding of math or music or spatial relationships. Some children may not do any written work until age 10 or 11, then blossom into articulate, thoughtful writers because they had the time to develop their imagination and creativity. Some children learn best with loud, physical activity; some need a quiet environment with few distractions. Some children learn best working together in a small group, while others learn more easily on their own. One fact is clear—trying to "shoe-horn" all these children into a single classroom results in a degraded educational environment for all of them.

Homeschooling families have discovered that homeschooling can provide what traditional schools cannot—a custom-tailored education program that is best suited to each individual child. The parent and child, working together, are in the best position to figure out the optimal environment in which to nurture the child's education and personal development. All parents have the fundamental right to choose how to raise their children; homeschooling parents choose to exercise this right by taking responsibility for selecting the best educational opportunities for their children.

## ***Whose Approval Matters?***

Parents don't need to get official approval before they help their child learn to walk, talk, maintain personal hygiene, develop a sense of ethics, learn to respect themselves and others, develop a sense of personal responsibility, volunteer in the community, participate in the democratic process, or choose a career path. No one would dream of requiring oversight of the content of the information, language, or values that the child is exposed to in the home. All of these play a much more critical role in developing a valuable member of society than being able to remember that "Columbus sailed the ocean blue in fourteen hundred ninety two". Yet parents are required, in many states, to get approval to teach reading, writing, and arithmetic. In short, they must ask for permission to exercise their fundamental right to choose the most

appropriate education for their child.

Parents' choices about how to educate their children should be treated with the same respect as their choice of faith or of political affiliation, or even of choosing their health care provider. Whether this choice is to place the child in a public school or private school, or to educate the children themselves, the responsibility for the choice belongs to the parents. Parents of homeschoolers, just like parents of children in private school, must have the freedom to choose the approach that best fits their child.

### ***Regulation vs. Innovation***

American industry has come to understand that the top-down "factory model" may have worked for assembling Model A's, but it doesn't work well to stimulate creative solutions, innovative improvements, or participatory problem-solving. From factories to advertising agencies, businesses are encouraging small teams to innovate and find new solutions. Sales managers and human resources managers understand that changing what is measured can dramatically change the actions of those being measured.

Yet our "education industry" is stuck in the Model A factory mode of top-down decisions and of measuring performance with outmoded, inappropriate measuring devices such as standardized tests. Test scores are easy to measure and compare, and, with the recent outcry for accountability, more of the educational focus in schools is on enhancing test performance than on learning. Worksheets and weekly tests may be an efficient way for a teacher to evaluate a classroom of 20 to 40 students but they do not measure the quality of a child's educational and personal development, nor do they acknowledge the various ways in which children learn. One-size-fits-all assessment is no more effective than one-size-fits-all curriculum.

Anyone (parent, tutor or teacher) who has worked closely with a child on a one-to-one basis for a month or more has a very good idea of how the child is progressing, what the child knows, and which skills the child is developing. Homeschooling parents, who have voluntarily taken on the responsibility for their children's education, must not be shackled by regulations and measurements based on the old factory model.

### ***To Comply or Not to Comply***

Homeschoolers are discovering that it requires ongoing effort just to maintain the scope of their existing freedom to educate their children because, as light attracts moths, freedom attracts those who want to impose restrictions. Every limit, even if innocuous or easily complied with, is as another drop of water, slowly but steadily eroding parents' rights. Some parents practice minimal compliance (complying with the bare minimum of the legal requirements) because they have found that complacent compliance with school administrators' additional requests breeds yet more constraints.

Many regulations put in place to govern homeschoolers are put there out of fear that homeschooling will be used as a cover for neglect. In reality, it is much easier for neglectful parents to ship their children off to school for most of the day than it is to take responsibility for their education (and to have them around the house). There are laws that cover neglect and abuse and it should not be the purpose of homeschooling laws to duplicate laws already in effect.

These regulations, while attempting to address possible abuse by a few, end up restricting all homeschoolers' rights. They are equivalent to requiring all legislators to pass competency tests in current events, economics and public health because a few legislators made decisions in ignorance, or requiring all reporters to take polygraph examinations because a few plagiarize or fabricate their stories. Abuse of the system by a few does not justify significant intrusions into the freedom of all.

Some homeschooling parents, in pursuit of their children's education, have reached the conclusion that

many of today's regulations are not merely a nuisance but are harmful to their children's educational progress. These parents may choose to "go underground" when their efforts to block or overturn regulations are opposed by the vested interests of the education industry. Some homeschoolers choose not to register with school districts, and not to participate in tax-sponsored programs offered by the schools. As many Quakers chose not to participate in mandatory military aggression, so many homeschoolers conscientiously object to participating in this "aggressive attack" on their parental rights and freedoms.

### ***Conclusion***

As homeschooling gains acceptance and momentum, homeschoolers can anticipate more vocal opposition and more aggressive actions designed to both limit homeschooling freedoms and to seduce homeschoolers back into the system through "free" education programs. Homeschoolers, however, will continue to work to preserve their rights for the sake of their children.

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