

HIGHLIGHTS OF THE PENNSYLVANIA HOME EDUCATION LAW

This handout is designed as an OVERVIEW of the law. If you decide to homeschool, you should read the actual law yourself! I have included many internet links, which will help you to understand and comply with the law. Find these links and lots more useful information at my web site, <http://www.askpauline.com>. --Pauline Harding, askpauline@comcast.net

Alternatives to the Home Education Law

Please note that this handout refers to homeschooling under the "Home Education Program" part of the law. There are a number of other options for families who teach their children at home, including the Private Tutor law and public cyber-charter schools. Each of these options has pros and cons, and may or may not be a good fit for your family. See ALTERNATIVES TO THE HOME ED LAW at www.askpauline.com

Who must report to the school district?

You must file assorted paperwork for each child you will be homeschooling if he or she is between the ages of 8 and 17.

--If the child has been enrolled in school in 1st grade or above, and is under 17, you must file, even if the child is not yet 8.

--If your child is not yet 8, and has not been to 1st grade or above, you do not need to report to the school district in any way (you don't have to file an affidavit, keep a log, submit a portfolio, etc.), and most parents choose not to.

--If your child turns eight before or during the first two weeks of the school year, the affidavit needs to be filed by the child's birth date.

--If the child turns 8 during the school term, the affidavit should be filed prior to the beginning of the next school year.

See COMPULSORY SCHOOL AGE at www.askpauline.com.

File The Affidavit On or Before August 1

"A notarized affidavit" *must be filed by* "the parent or guardian or other person having legal custody of the child or children", "prior to the commencement of the home education program and annually thereafter" *on or before August 1*. For affidavit forms, see AFFIDAVIT at www.askpauline.com. You must have the affidavit notarized - try an auto tags place, a bank, or AAA. The affidavit is filed with your local school district - get a receipt. Keep a copy of the affidavit for your records.

The affidavit must include:

--*"the name of the supervisor of the home education program who shall be responsible for the provision of instruction" "Supervisor" shall mean the parent or guardian or such person having legal custody of the child or children who shall be responsible for the provision of instruction, provided that such person has a high school diploma or its equivalent.*" You should not have to submit a copy of your diploma with your affidavit.

--*"the name and age of each child who shall participate in the home education program"*

--*"the address and telephone number of the home education program site"*

-- *"a certification to be signed by the supervisor that the supervisor, all adults living in the home and persons having legal custody of a child or children in a home education program have not been convicted of the criminal offenses enumerated in subsection (e) of section 111 within five years immediately preceding the date of the affidavit."* See AFFIDAVIT at www.askpauline.com for a list of these offenses.

--*"that such subjects as required by law are offered in the English language"*

--*"evidence that the child has been immunized ... and has received the health and medical services required for students of the child's age or grade level..."*. For details about the health requirements, see IMMUNIZATIONS & MEDICAL REQUIREMENTS at www.askpauline.com.

--*"and that the home education program shall comply with the provisions of this section and that the notarized affidavit shall be satisfactory evidence thereof."*

The affidavit must also include *"an outline of proposed education objectives by subject area"*. This is typically only 1-2 pages, and is usually very general. You do not have to make detailed plans in advance. You do not have to plan formal lessons or use a purchased curriculum. For several examples, see OBJECTIVES at www.askpauline.com. *"The required outline of proposed education objectives shall not be utilized by the superintendent in determining if the home education program is out of compliance..."*

Need to submit approval of the home ed program with the affidavit for Special Education Students

"Any student who has been identified ... as needing special education services, excluding those students identified as gifted and/or talented, shall be in compliance with the requirements of compulsory attendance by participating in a home education program... when the program addresses the specific needs of the exceptional student and is approved by a teacher with a valid certificate from the Commonwealth to teach special education or a licensed clinical or certified school psychologist, and written notification of such approval is submitted with the notarized affidavit..."

"The supervisor of a home education program may request that the school district or intermediate unit of residence provide services that address the specific needs of the exceptional student in the home education program. When the provision of services is agreed to by both the supervisor and the school district or intermediate unit, all services shall be provided in the public schools or in a private school licensed to provide such programs and services." See SPECIAL ED. at www.askpauline.com for details, and EVALUATOR LIST for people who are qualified to do the approval.

Required number of days or hours of instruction

The law requires that you provide

*"a minimum of one hundred eighty (180) days of instruction
OR nine hundred (900) hours of instruction per year at the elementary level,
or nine hundred ninety (990) hours per year at the secondary level."*

Do NOT get hung up on what is "school" and what is "not-school". Remember that weekend trips to museums, sports, active play, nightly bedtime stories, trips to the library, and dinner table discussions are often instructional time for homeschoolers. You do not need a fixed timetable. You do not need to confirm to the public school calendar. You do not have to give formal lessons or use a purchased curriculum. Subjects can be taught informally if you prefer. You do not have to adhere to local, state, or national educational standards. See DAYS/HOURS for more information, and USEFUL FORMS for print-and-use attendance charts, at www.askpauline.com.

Subjects to be taught

"At the elementary school level [grades 1-6], the following courses shall be taught: English, to include spelling, reading and writing; arithmetic; science; geography; history of the United States and Pennsylvania; civics; safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires; health and physiology; physical education; music; and art."

"At the secondary school level [grades 7-12], the following courses shall be taught: English, to include language, literature, speech and composition; science; geography; social studies, to include civics, world history, history of the United States and Pennsylvania; mathematics, to include general mathematics, algebra and geometry; art; music; physical education; health; and safety education, including regular and continuous instruction in the dangers and prevention of fires."

Remember that these subjects may be taught formally, using textbooks and worksheets, or informally, using discussion, field trips, and library books. Obviously, some of these subjects warrant more time than others. Also, you can of course teach any other subjects you choose, such as religion or foreign language. In addition, many subjects overlap, for example writing and illustrating a paper about bears could include reading, writing, spelling, art, and science. You do not need to teach all of these subjects each year – only Fire Safety is required annually. If you don't feel capable of teaching a particular subject, you may wish to use a correspondence class, enroll your child in a homeschool co-op or class, hire a tutor, or use an on-line class. See REQUIRED SUBJECTS at www.askpauline.com.

School District must lend textbooks

"The school district of residence shall, at the request of the supervisor, lend to the home education program copies of the school district's planned courses, textbooks and other curriculum materials appropriate to the student's age and grade level."

Your most important homeschooling resource is your library card. Mail-order companies and local teacher supply stores sell curricular materials and other resources to homeschoolers. See CURRICULUM at www.askpauline.com.

End Of Year Documentation

"In order to demonstrate that appropriate education is occurring, the supervisor of the home education program shall provide and maintain on file the following documentation for each student enrolled in the home education program"... "Such documentation [the portfolio and evaluation] ...shall be provided to the public school district of residence superintendent at the conclusion of each public school year." The portfolio and evaluator's report must be given to the school district by June 30. You do not need to meet with anyone from the school.

Portfolio of records and materials

"The portfolio shall consist of "

"a log, made contemporaneously with the instruction, which designates by title the reading materials used, "

You will need to keep a list of the books you've used. See LOG and USEFUL FORMS at www.askpauline.com.

"samples of any writings, worksheets, workbooks or creative materials used or developed by the student "

Samples could include worksheets, tests, reports, stories, drawings, or other student work. You can also include brochures from outings (zoo map, museum brochure, concert program, event flyer), photos (of projects, creations, experiments; or of the child on outings, doing athletics, in a performance), lists (of outings, activities, sports, books, phys ed activities), certificates (scouts, science fair), descriptions of areas of study, etc. See PORTFOLIOS at www.askpauline.com

"and in grades three, five and eight results of nationally normed standardized achievement tests in reading/language arts and mathematics or the results of Statewide tests administered in these grade levels."

Tests, which cost about \$15 to \$45, are available from homeschool groups and evaluators, or from mail-order sources.

Tests can be taken in a group or individually at home. See TESTING at www.askpauline.com for a list of acceptable tests and test suppliers. Your child does NOT need to take the PSSA or be tested at a school.

Annual written evaluation of the student's educational progress

"The evaluation shall also be based on an interview of the child and a review of the portfolio ... and shall certify whether or not an appropriate education is occurring." "Appropriate education" shall mean a program consisting of instruction in the required subjects for the time required in this act and in which the student demonstrates sustained progress in the overall program."

The parents hire an evaluator of their choosing. Evaluators must meet certain legal requirements. See EVALUATIONS and the EVALUATOR LIST at www.askpauline.com. You do not have to meet with anyone from the school.

Can my child participate in curricular or extra-curricular activities at the school district where we live?

"Yes" to extra-curricular activities (sports, band, clubs), thanks to a new law. "Maybe" to curricular activities - each school district decides whether or not homeschoolers may participate in curricular activities. Remember, in many cases, similar opportunities are available in the homeschool community. See PUBLIC SCHOOL EXTRACURRICULARS at www.askpauline.com.

Is the parent required to do all the teaching?

No. The supervisor of the home education program is ultimately responsible for the provision of instruction, but is not required to provide all of the instruction personally.

How does a Pennsylvania home educated child receive a high school diploma?

There are many options for home-educated high school students. In PA, probably the most popular option is to use one of the PA homeschool diploma programs, but there are other options available too, including a parent-issued diploma, the GED, a year of college, a correspondence school, a public cyber-charter school, or an out-of-state diploma program. More info on these options is at HOMESCHOOLING HIGH SCHOOL at www.askpauline.com.

You should never have to choose between educating your child and following the law. If you are finding the law to be an obstacle in educating your child, re-read the law, and talk to experienced homeschoolers. Chances are you are doing more than is necessary to comply with the law.