

Vermont Home Education Network

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House Education Committee Vermont Home Education Network (VHEN) Testimony of Retta Dunlap

I am a retired homeschooling mom who homeschooled four children K-12 and on into college. I have lead a local homeschool group, been on the boards of statewide groups and now advocate and lobby for homeschooling in the State House. I still answer emails and phone calls from public/private school parents seeking information about homeschooling and homeschooling parents needing help. I even get calls from public school parents needing help in dealing with their local school. I never talk parents into homeschooling as it is a tough job and you have to be driven to do it.

Other groups over the years: (not currently active)

Vermont Home Educators Association (worked on the law in 1987)
Christian Home Educators of Vermont (has come and gone over the years)
Vermont Association of Home Educators (during the Maple case years)

How homeschoolers connect:

- **Message boards:** There are multiple Yahoo groups for Vermont homeschoolers. VHEN has and I moderate the biggest one in Vermont with nearly 600 homeschoolers on it. I also moderate another one for Christian homeschooling Moms at nearly 150 members. There are others not connected to VHEN that I can post information on.
- **Email lists:** I have an email list of 600 names on it that I send out emails too.
- **Facebook pages:** numerous Facebook pages the largest of which has 1400 members
- **Local support groups:** Parents get together to create enrichment programs, field trips, field days, and simply get together to enjoy each other's company at picnics.

Who are homeschoolers:

Parents come from all walks of life. From Christian to Pagan, left to right politically, or no label at all. They have college degrees or only high school diplomas and even someone without a high school diploma. Some are licensed teacher and some have never taught anyone. Yet all stand on common ground: we support the liberty of the parent to direct the educational life of a child from the home.

What homeschoolers do:

Homeschooling is a broad term that covers many facets of homeschooling. As the parents/families are different so is the educational style. Unschooling, which is NOT "no schooling" is parent intensive in that the parent must make sure the learning environment is filled with educational opportunities for the child to explore. At the other end of the spectrum is a traditional style which is workbook/classroom driven which is child intensive as the child must do a lot of bookwork. Most commonly, you will find homeschooling to be a mix of the two. Homeschooling works because it is one on one learning tutorial style of education - the best form of education there is.

History of the Statute:

Pre 1987 – status of homeschooling in state was approval
1987 – 166b was passed into law removing approval and made this a notification statute
1989 – The Agency of Education was given a position, called the home study consultant, to oversee the home study program
1998-2000 – Maple case – according to VT Supreme Court this is not an approval statute but a notification statute and merely receiving the enrollment notice signals parent's intent
2006 – Changes made to reduce paper work on both families and the then Department of Education, now an Agency

This statute has work for over 30 years showing that it was a carefully craft statute which balanced the State's interest in the education of a child with the Parent's right to educate their own child. Furthermore, this statute is intentionally prescriptive as to what the Agency can ask for to satisfy this interest while protecting the liberty of the parent to choose this type of education for their child.

Kingdom of Children

Culture and Controversy in the Homeschooling Movement

By Dr. Mitchell Stevens

Dr. Stevens is a Professor of Sociology at Hamilton College and we can learn a lot about the homeschooling movement in Vermont, from *Kingdom of Children*. Although he studied both religious and non-religious homeschooling for 10 years in the Midwest along with a few national organizations, his book could have been written about Vermont homeschoolers. We are not a homogenous group and our ways of organizing ourselves can be very different. Yet it does not matter where on the political or religious spectrum we find ourselves, we have some powerful ideas that give us some common ground. Dr. Stevens writes:

“The plurality of home schoolers makes them harder for the rest of us to comprehend. On what could fundamentalists and atheists, Muslims and Mormons, Buddhists, and Baptists all agree? I found that despite their varied backgrounds, home schoolers agree that children have enormous potential for distinctive accomplishments and that standardized ways of educating children temper or even squelch this potential. Home schoolers also are wary of state intrusion into family life and generally are skeptical of the ability of bureaucracies and “experts” to meet the task of child rearing. Because these beliefs are rooted in some cherished American cultural traditions, they are compelling to a wide range of people.” Page 5

“... what I found most remarkable about home schoolers was the big item on which they agreed. Time and again, parents told me that **their children’s self-development was worthy of virtually any sacrifice.**” Page 8

“American civil law has long lent **sanctity to the parent-child relationship.**” Page 41

“The inherent complexity and uniqueness of each child renders conventional schooling inadequate as well as the philosophies behind it....” Page 43

“What distinguishes home schoolers from other parents is not their basic understanding of childhood but rather the exceptional extent to which home schoolers have elaborated that understanding and put it into practice.” Page 70

“[Through] the terms of contemporary childhood.... homeschoolers have shown us what a demanding creature childhood can be. It is cranky about standardized treatment, preferring customized service: from schools certainly, but also from churches and child care providers and the wide array of organization that help parents nurture little selves into maturity. Our contemporary child needs to be understood in all its uniqueness.... from some one or two grown-ups who are heroically committed to putting in the time.....In exchange for the trouble it causes, this childhood offers enormous promise.” Page 189