

Hi everyone.

There's another threat in the air about recent proposals to change the homeschooling laws that caused a huge shock for homeschooling families in the U.K.

This article explains how it may affect us all.

So I'm giving everyone fair warning - there are about to be some heavy words thrown down all up in here.

A Curious Article

You see, it all started last week. I was having my morning coffee, browsing the news on the 'Net about homeschooling, when I came across [an article](#) that basically said U.K. homeschoolers will be required to show their local authorities that their children are in fact, being properly homeschooled. In return, the government plans to offer programs that weren't available in the past for the homeschool community - some programs include "swimming lessons, cycle tests, work experience, special needs help and access to proper examinations for their children".

Hmm. Doesn't sound like an equitable exchange, does it?

I mean, the special needs help may be valid (these needs were not defined in the article), but if parents have taken the enormous responsibility to homeschool their children, wouldn't you assume that routine extra-curricular activities such as swimming lessons or giving their children the opportunity to take the national college entrance exam are things that parents can manage on their own, without local authorities helping out? If parents can't even do that, then you gotta wonder whether homeschooling is right for them at all.

So now I got all curious and started doing more snooping around, finding more articles on this subject. And after digging around, I managed to come up with this loose list of proposed requirements for homeschoolers (there's more, but these are the big ones):

- 1) Parents will have to register with the local authorities each year they homeschool,
- 2) Parents will have to "provide a clear statement of their educational approach, intent and desired outcomes for the child over the following twelve months" (sounds like a curriculum plan along with expected milestones),
- 3) Parents will be judged by the local authorities on whether parents are making progress against the curriculum plan and expected milestones mentioned in #2 above,

How Changes to U.K. Homeschooling Laws Affect You (6/13/09)

- 4) Local authorities will have the right to refuse homeschool registration if there is clear evidence of “safe guarding concerns”, and
- 5) Trained local authorities will have the right, with two weeks notice, to speak to the children WITHOUT parents present, to assess whether they are “safe” and being taught properly per #2 above.

These rules are not laws yet, but they’ve been “accepted in full by the [U.K.] government”.

The Rules - Examined

Now, from a rules and laws perspective, proposed rules 1 through 4 are what I would collectively call “strict” regulations. Compare these regulations with New York’s homeschooling laws and you’ll see similarities – see my article on [Homeschooling Regulations](#). And despite these strict homeschooling laws, there are successful New Yorkers homeschooling today.

Rule number 5, however, deserves to be promoted to its own special category, and earns the title of “Regulation-Gone-Wild!!” – Yes, that’s TWO exclamation points for double emphasis.

You see, I acknowledge the guiding principles behind these proposed regulations, “to strike the right balance between two important principles: giving parents the right to decide how and where their children should be educated and ensuring that every child gets the education they need to help them fulfil [U.K. English] their potential.”

But when you place something like the “Regulation-Gone-Wild!!” on top of the other 4 “strict” regulations, well...it’s kinda like dropping a 100 Lb. weight on a 20 Lb. scale. BAM! No more scale. Just broken pieces.

I’m specifically referring to the part about the local authority’s power to interview children without the presence of their parents and how dangerous that can really be – children, can be made to say almost anything...even against their parents.

Now, I’m not sure whether our friends in the U.K. had this experience, but there was something here on this side of the pond called the McMartin Preschool Case in the 80’s, in which the caregivers were charged with 321 counts of child molestation and abuse. The primary evidence? Testimonials from the children, who were interviewed by Children’s Institute International, an anti-child abuse organization (I know you know where I’m going with this, but I’ll go there anyway).

Ultimately, the jury just couldn’t find any of the charged caregivers guilty since the tapings of the interviews apparently showed improper interview tactics. So, after 6 years of criminal trials, all charges were dropped. What a great way to spend those tax payer dollars!

I mean, here you have some allegations which, and I count myself as a guilty party, were assumed to be true because you had a reputable organization interviewing the children. I grew up in Los Angeles, and I remember at the time, even though I was just a six-grader, all the talk about how disgusting the caregivers were to do all those despicable acts to the children.

Can you even imagine what the caregivers were going through?

Anyway, the reason why I bring this case up is because it illustrates that children can easily be manipulated, which makes the "Rule-Gone-Wild!!" an especially onerous one. And don't forget, it was the taped interviews in the McMartin case that ultimately won the charged parties back their freedom.

At this point, I know nothing about whether the local U.K. authorities in charge of inspecting the children will be coming with recording equipment. I hope they do for the sakes of the homeschooling families.

One last point on the "Rule-Gone-Wild!!" - if you were a parent in the U.K. who sent your child to public school initially but then pulled out because the public school didn't offer what your child needed, how then, would you feel if representatives from that same school district came to your house to assess whether your child was safe and learning properly? Isn't that like a student who just flunked the driver's test determining whether your own driving habits are safe?

The thought just makes me shiver.

Ok - enough of talking just about the rules. Let's talk future outlook and what this all means for us.

Future Outlook

The implementation of these proposed rules is obviously a setback for the U.K. homeschooling families.

But what may not be that obvious is that there are some dark and heavy undercurrents pointing to some sort of showdown across Europe, the U.S., and the rest of the world as it relates to homeschooling laws. Not an Armageddon (because the situation can still be defused if we're all proactive about it), but definitely a showdown between the regulators and the homeschoolers.

This is the comment directly from the U.K.'s Children's Secretary in the article that really started my theory of the showdown, "[More homeschooling regulations are needed to] bring us into line with many European and other developed countries".

So what I inferred from the Children's Secretary's comment is that, given the proposed regulations mentioned above, the U.K. isn't ruling out the possibility of even more regulations in the future.

Also, I didn't even know there was a desire in the U.K. to embrace homeschooling regulations similar to those of other European countries.

Now, let's see what's going on in our country. The Obama camp just announced its own initiative on fixing education here. The solution? Industrial Strength No Child Left Behind (NCLB)! The "Industrial" part comes from more funding for schools and pay-for-performance features for teachers. Oh, and also, improved tracking of student academic performance through stricter achievement benchmarks and national certification for all teachers (whether homeschool teachers are included in this, we'll see).

I don't know about you but this sounds like tougher standardization to me.

Not concerned yet?

Get this - ever since I was old enough to understand the shortcomings of the public education system in the U.S. (and I'm talking about this on a national level, so this does NOT apply to each and all school districts), it seems one of the favorite pastimes in illustrating these shortcomings, especially by highly-sought-after-intellectuals, is by comparing our education systems to those of other countries.

"Our kids only achieved [insert low percentage here] in math and science while [insert any country] kids performed at 80%" - this seems to be a required mantra of sorts, especially when coming from U.S. presidents talking about reforming the state of education.

So, now it was President Obama's turn and he said that he wants to lengthen the school calendar and compared our public school year with South Korea's, which is a month longer.

Now, I don't remember how many times I've heard U.S. presidents comparing our education system to a foreign country's education system, but it's A LOT. And if done enough, someone in President Obama's cabinet team might actually say, "Hey, after we get done comparing education progress against ourselves, why not start to look outward and start formally comparing against those foreign countries that always seem to rack up those glowing figures in academic performance?"

And that's EXACTLY what happened.

Per CNN, [this article](#) states that Education Secretary Arne Duncan, "...is pushing for new benchmarks that would use international standards to compare American students with those overseas."

My fear here is that this spirit of global standardization may spill over into homeschooling territory, and I would just hate to see that happen. I don't want to raise unnecessary concerns, but think about this, there's the U.K. driving towards increased homeschooling laws partly to come up to standards with other European countries. Then, there's us with Obama pushing Industrial Strength NCLB, especially with a desire for teachers to be nationally certified. Oh, and let's not forget Duncan's comments about wanting to measure U.S. education against international benchmarks.

Connect the dots. See what you get. It doesn't seem too pretty to me.

Remedies

So what can we, as homeschooling Americans, do in this global environment favoring increasing standardization?

In the short run, we should prepare our children now about what to say to adults if they approach our children to talk about homeschooling – of course, we as parents would probably intercept the conversation midway, but there's always a chance that our children could have an entire brief conversation with the adults.

Think about 3 top questions that an adult might ask about homeschooling and rehearse responses with your child if you have to. The top 3 questions might be:

- 1) Why do you homeschool?
- 2) Do you like it? and
- 3) How do you make friends?

But whatever responses you practice with your children, do this in the spirit of clarifying questions about homeschooling – in no case should it be about giving false answers.

"And why", you ask, "Should we do this?"

Because if this global showdown happens, the smoke clears, and the last one standing is Team Regulators, you at least want to be prepared for a U.S. version of "Rule-Gone-Wild!!".

In the long run, be informed about developments in homeschooling laws, not just in your state, but in all states, and in some cases (like this one) poke your head out and see how other

ProntoLessons.com

Articles

How Changes to U.K. Homeschooling Laws Affect You (6/13/09)

countries are developing their homeschooling regulations. You can get your updates at the Home School Legal Defense Association's [website](#).

As for the homeschool families in the U.K., my thoughts go out to all 80,000 of them. I do hope they can organize and create a successful unity of effort to prevent "Regulation-Gone-Wild!!" and as many as the "strict" regulations from becoming laws.

In the meantime, be on the lookout on my New page for updates on the U.K. homeschooling issue.

See you next time!

- Sun