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# We Stand for Homeschooling

The very nature, language and essence of homeschooling are being challenged and even co-opted by a vast array of emerging educational programs which may be based in the home, but are funded by government tax dollars, bringing inevitable government controls. These new “home-based” publicly-funded entities are variously called: charter schools, cyber-charters, e-schools, Independent Study Programs (ISP), dual enrollment, Blended Schools Programs (BSP), Programs for Non-Public Students (PNPS), Public School Alternative Programs (PSAP), virtual schools, academies, community schools, home bound, and other newly-devised terms and concepts. There is a profound possibility that homeschooling is not only on the brink of losing its distinctiveness, but also is in grave danger of losing its independence. A recent article in *Education Week* illustrates the problem.

Now, the situation has been upended in an unanticipated manner as proponents of home schooling in California, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and other states use charter school regulations to launch cyber schools. In many cases, youngsters who were already being schooled wholly at home are simply turning to cyber charter schools as a conduit to public funding, but others who had been in classrooms are staying home, too, to take whole schedules of courses online.<sup>1</sup>

This view is distorted and incorrect. The vast majority of homeschoolers has never sought public funding. The “proponents” are those who would make a profit from publicly-financed home-based education. These proponents are not homeschoolers. The newly-emerging consumers of these programs are being misled into thinking these programs are homeschooling. Anyone who is enrolled in a publicly-funded school

program, even if that public school is based in the home, is a public school student and not a homeschooler.

Further evidence of an unprecedented crisis is seen in a report from the *Ozaukee Press* (WI). Reporting on the development of Wisconsin Virtual Academy, a for-profit K12, Inc. cyber-charter school directed by William Bennett:

[Northern Ozaukee] School Board member Kate Redmond said she liked the idea of using a virtual school to reach out to families that want homeschooling for their children. “It is bringing home schooling under the state’s umbrella,” Redmond said.<sup>2</sup>

One of the most blatant examples of “blending” homeschooling with existing public school models is represented in the Okaloosa County (FL) Blended School Project:

This proposal is designed to create a seamless educational plan for two groups of students: students that are schooled at home and students that are schooled at “government schools” (public schools). The proposal on the following pages would add a third choice beyond just home school or government schools...Blended Schools (BSP).<sup>3</sup>

In an additional report from the *Akron Beacon Journal* regarding Ohio’s TRECA, a cyber-school consortium of multiple school districts:

Educating children at home is the fastest growing element of charter schools in the state. Enrollment could soar from about 3,000 cyber-school students last year to more than 12,000 in the next few years. [The superintendent] estimates that

while the schools receive more than \$5,000 in state and local money per child, the cost is only \$2,500 per elementary pupil and \$3,500 per high schooler. He said public school districts would use profits to fund other school programs, while for-profit companies would pocket the difference.<sup>4</sup>

What happens to homeschooling when publicly-funded school programs come under fire as has already begun? What will be the inevitable results of this guilt by association? As cited in *Education Week*:

Ohio’s first online charter school—the Electronic Classroom Of Tomorrow, or eCOT—received \$1.7 million in state payments for students who may not have met enrollment requirements in September and October of 2000, a recent state audit concludes.<sup>5</sup>

We understand that it is pure folly to define what homeschooling is because of its diversity; nor can any one group pretend to speak for all homeschoolers. However, some educational programs can be clearly identified as NOT homeschooling. It is time to take a strong stand. Any time home education comes under “the state’s umbrella” through public funding, it is no longer homeschooling. It is now public schooling.

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**WHEREAS** a significant aspect of homeschooling is the independence from government control that it holds for every family regardless of the approach to education they choose;

**WHEREAS** charter school enrollees are public school students;

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**WHEREAS** publicly-funded programs have co-opted the very language which homeschoolers have developed and utilized for years, including words and concepts such as: home education, family-based, parent-directed, independent family education, and the very word homeschooling itself. Publicly-funded cyber-schools are often misidentified as homeschools and the public will view them as homeschools if they are allowed to co-opt the language of homeschooling;

**WHEREAS** it is clear that the strongest motivation of the proponents of publicly-funded programs is access to taxpayer monies;

**WHEREAS** savvy marketing and slick corporate styled PR campaigns are purposely blurring the distinct difference between a publicly-funded cyber-school conducted at a place of residence and a homeschool, and in the process they are insulting parents by stating that homeschooling is extremely “arduous”, “you need not feel frantic,” and you need an “expert;”

**WHEREAS** homeschool parents are capable, intelligent people who accept responsibility for their children’s education and have been effective without the enticements of a computer, “experts,” reimbursements or packaged curriculum, and have succeeded without standards-driven accountability models, testing and other government interference;

**WHEREAS** the biggest difference between homeschools and publicly-funded school programs is that homeschoolers take direct responsibility by choosing a curriculum, an approach to learning, and the principles and values on which these are based while publicly-funded school program parents accept and follow detailed instructions about what to learn and how to learn it, using a curriculum designed to comply with state requirements and values;

**WHEREAS** cyber-public schools—masquerading as homeschools—are justifiably under fire for abuses, inevitably tarring homeschooling with the same brush; and

**WHEREAS** corporations are finding willing accomplices in school district administrations who are enticed by the financial gains corporations are promising their districts. Public school districts, because of the loss of funding, have pre-empted the for-profit corporations by starting their own publicly-funded in-home programs, even districts which object in principle to charter schools,

**NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED** that the words and concepts of homeschooling should not be used by publicly-funded school programs, and/or by the corporations that control them, to seek legitimacy or profit;

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the words and concepts of homeschooling should not be used to seek legitimacy by those who have chosen to enroll in a publicly-funded school program. These families should honestly call such enrollment what it is—enrollment in public school. Their choices should not compromise others’ rights to remain independent.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the signers of this statement will work to ensure that the basic right to choose an education consistent with one’s principles and beliefs is maintained for homeschoolers by informing homeschoolers and the general public that public school programs (including charter schools) that are easily confused with homeschools threaten the freedom to choose an education consistent with one’s principles and beliefs; and

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the signers of this statement will encourage homeschoolers to make known explicitly and publicly how public school programs that are easily confused with homeschools threaten our basic homeschooling freedoms and the nature, language, and definition of homeschooling.

**BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED** that the signers to this document reclaim homeschooling.

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We encourage you to print and circulate this document widely. We also encourage others to join us by signing this statement at the website: <http://www.westandforhomeschooling.org>

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<sup>1</sup> Education Week “The Virtual Schoolhouse,” by Gene I. Maeroff, February 26, 2003

<sup>2</sup> Ozaukee Press, “Virtual school gets go-ahead in Fredonia,” by Mark Jaeger, February 6, 2003

<sup>3</sup> Okaloosa County (FL) Blended School Project Proposal at -- [http://www.okaloosa.k12.fl.us/stuserv/ci/blended\\_school\\_information.htm](http://www.okaloosa.k12.fl.us/stuserv/ci/blended_school_information.htm)

<sup>4</sup> Akron Beacon Journal, “Funding falls short for cyberschools,” by Dennis J. Willard and Doug Oplinger, July 17, 2002

<sup>5</sup> Education Week, “Ohio Audit Reveals Difficulties Of Tracking Online Students,” by Andrew Trotter, December 5, 2001

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