

Opinion:

Children's rights to homeschooling attacked

By Alan Bonsteel, San Francisco Chronicle, March 11, 2008

Imagine the outrage that would result if someone in the California Legislature introduced a bill mandating that our credentialed public schoolteachers must come from the bottom quartile of their college classes. And yet, studies have shown that on the average, that is the case.

On Feb. 28, a California appellate court ruled that California parents may not homeschool their children unless those parents are credentialed teachers. What planet are those judges coming from? Why would they think a California teaching credential is a sign of knowledge and teaching ability?

Home schooling was a rarity until about 25 years ago, when the declining quality of our public schools forced many families to search elsewhere to educate their children. Now, an estimated 166,000 children are homeschooled in California alone. Those homeschoolers do far better on standardized tests, and go on to college at a far higher rate, than children trapped in our public schools. And, of course, the violence that plagues so many of our public schools is unknown to homeschoolers.

Homeschoolers have the privilege of learning at their own pace, and in an educational pedagogy that suits their own style of learning. And they benefit from the extraordinary gift of being taught by the people who know them the best and love them the most - their parents.

Teaching is a noble profession, and of course good teachers should be well compensated. California is spending \$11,541 per K-12 student, or \$346,230 for a classroom of 30, according to the California Office of the Secretary of Education (links.sfgate.com/ZCRU). With that kind of money, public schoolteachers should be getting six-figure salaries and the system should be attracting the best and the brightest.

The only test that California public schoolteachers have to pass is the CBEST, an 8th-grade level exam. Because they are supposed to be college graduates, would it not make more sense for them to be asked to pass a college-level test? The Graduate Record Exam, for example? And too many of our science and mathematics teachers have no college degree in their subjects.

As if all that wasn't enough to produce a crisis of teacher quality in California's public schools, the weakest teachers are protected by a system of tenure and the California Teachers Association, the most powerful political force in the state.

Given this crisis in our public schools, and the demonstrated ability (links.sfgate.com/ZCRV) of many homeschooled students to easily outperform their public-school counterparts, one would think that California's judges and elected officials would be doing everything possible to encourage more home schooling. It's hard to think of any values more universally held than the

sanctity of the family and the protection of our children, and the right of families to direct the education of their children is so widely acknowledged that it was codified in the U.N. Declaration of Universal Human Rights.

If there is a silver lining in this bizarre court decision, it is that it will be a mighty unifier of the school choice movement. Never was the adage that "politics make strange bedfellows" more true than in school choice, with private school voucher advocates, charter school partisans and homeschoolers forming an uneasy alliance. But a direct threat to use the police power of the state to deny to families a quality education for their homeschooled children will focus the will of all to make sure that one day soon, no child in our great country will be denied the right to a quality education chosen by the family.

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