ACCOMMODATIONS IN HOMESCHOOL SETTINGS FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL EDUCATION NEEDS (SEN): PA Focus

Dr. Patti Stoudt
HIS Homeschool Center
www.his-homeschool-center.com
The Need

“I have been praying and searching for someone to help me out with this being that all of my homeschool contacts haven't a clue about special needs and all of my special needs contacts haven't a clue about homeschooling! I feel as though I have been winging it and walking in the dark so to speak.”

(personal communication at the end of my research, March 3, 2012)
The Privilege

- Homeschooling
  - Legal in all 50 states
  - Each state has very different laws.
    - This webinar - focus on PA.
    - Each homeschooling family submits an affidavit and educational objectives annually.
    - The Pennsylvania law (1988/2014) states that, “any student who has been identified pursuant to the provisions of the Education of the Handicapped Act (Public Law 91-230, 20 U.S.C. § 1401 et seq.) as needing special education services” may be homeschooled as long as a certified special education teacher or licensed school psychologist approves the program.
    - That means, if the child has been formally diagnosed, and labeled in documentation to the school district, the family must also submit a letter approving the educational objectives accompanying the affidavit.
Legal Considerations

- Pennsylvania Homeschooling Law (1988/2014) specifies, if the child has been formally diagnosed, and labeled in documentation to the school district:
  - Provide a letter from certified special ed. teacher or psychologist – approving the program as addressing the child’s SEN
  - May request special education services from the district
  - Both district & parents must be in agreement for the family to be able to access services.
- 2001 - Congress banned any provision of the No Child Left Behind act being applied to homeschoolers (Isenberg, 2007).
Evaluations

- Do I need a special ed. certified teacher?
- What do I need to provide?
  - Log
  - Portfolio (minimum 3 samples/subject)
  - We didn’t use many textbooks, so I wrote a summary per subject for my children’s portfolios, even though not required
  - Your child
- What should I expect?
  - Hopefully a celebration of your year!
Standardized Testing

- Standardized achievement tests required for “grades 3, 5, & 8”
- What grade is my child with SEN in?
- What tests are available?
  - PA has a list of approved tests
- Are accommodations allowed?
  - Depends on the test
- Will they make me stop homeschooling if my child’s scores are low?
  - NO!
- I provide the WJ-IV (see my website)
Therefore, some families prefer to have their struggling learners remain unidentified in their documentation to the school district.

They may choose to seek support services for their children through private resources rather than requesting help from the school district.

This then presents the question of funding for these services.
The Dilemma

- Schools
  - Offer support services?
- Some districts are
  - Amicable
  - Adversarial
- Families
  - Utilize district services?
  - Utilize private services?
  - Go it on their own?
  - Advantages and disadvantages of each?
What is Practical?

“What I want is the absolute best for my boys. The man that Homeschool Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) put me in touch with through their special needs coordinator has tried to convince me to alert the public school that I have struggling learners. In our district, this is one of the worst things a home school family can do. I spoke with [an attorney from] HSLDA while at [a] convention and he said to not take that advice”

(personal communication at the beginning of my research, May 14, 2010).
But is Homeschooling Good for a Child with SEN?

**Tutoring Approach** – is one of the best educational approaches.
- 1-on-1 or small group (Hensley, 2009; Ray, 1997)
- Individualized in:
  - Curriculum (what is taught)
  - Instruction (how it is taught) (Hensley)
- **Sustained personalized alteration** - made regularly to adjust for materials or method (Ray)
- **Mastery Learning** – move on when they “get it.”
- **Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs** – 4\(^{th}\) level is where real learning happens
To Label or Not to Label?

Labeling conflict:
- Some parents want to avoid embarrassment that often comes with labels.

Several good reasons not to avoid labels:
- Help parents avoid denial
- Moving in a healthy manner through the natural stages of grief
- Help put a “handle” on child’s struggles
  - Helps parents locate information
  - How to address SEN
  - Focus on strengths and weaknesses, not just weaknesses
Sources for Support

School districts:

• Advantages: free (Lambert, 2001)
• Disadvantages:
  • Requires having program pre-approved by special ed. teacher
  • Greater risk to be more rigidly scrutinized and possibly questioned (Homeschooling a struggling learner, 2008).
Sources for Support

Private sources:

- Clinics, practitioners, colleges,
- **Advantages:**
  - Choice of provider
  - Can control information flow to the districts
- **Disadvantages:**
  - Possible distance and travel
  - Expense, often not covered by insurance

- County Behavioral Health/Support Office
  - Possible Therapeutic Staff Support (TSS) like a “teacher’s aide” for YOU!
  - Depends on personality blends
Sources for Support

• Later, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) – another reason for “labels”!
  • Job training/coaching
  • Support getting into college
  • Financial aid?
  • Depends on the office 😞
• PA offers the options of homeschool diplomas
  • Some programs are accommodating to SEN
  • Some courses can be marked ‘adaptive’
• College accommodations

One mom: Who would have thought. Severe dyslexia, couldn’t read on his own until 12th grade… 4 years after graduation says, “Mom, I think I want to go back to school for heavy equipment repair/operating.”
Importance & Significance

• Significance from a larger perspective
• Each human is created with a unique plan.
• Our job is to equip our children for that plan.
• That means focusing on what they can do (abilities)!
• Too often we focus on what they cannot do, conveying something wrong or broken.