



# The Home Education Foundation

"Home Educators' Voice at the Capitol"

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Home-educated students in Florida have the opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities. Florida Statutes 232.425, known as the Craig Dickinson Act, guarantees this opportunity. However, this was not always the case. The following is a history of HEF's work toward achieving this goal.

During the fall of 1994 and spring of 1995, Brenda Dickinson lobbied the Florida House and Senate to pass legislation which would allow county-registered home educated students to participate in such extracurricular activities as band, sports and competitive clubs in Florida public schools. Though the bill was passed unanimously, Governor Lawton Chiles vetoed it on June 8, 1995. Home-educated students continued to be denied access to extracurricular activities.

## BACKGROUND

This was important issue to home educated students because those students with exceptional abilities were being denied the opportunity to hone their skills and compete for college scholarships after the eighth grade. This occurred primarily because the Florida High School Activities Association, a private corporation, sanctioned by the National Federation of State High School Associations as the Florida member, essentially held a monopoly on all extracurricular activities in Florida public high schools. Some home educated students could access activities through city recreation leagues, the Home Education Sports Conference of Florida, or other small private school associations, but the level of competition did not provide an equal playing field. Rural students faced difficulty, since in many rural areas there are not enough home-educated students of the same age or interest to form a team.

## RENEWED EFFORTS

On June 13, 1995, following Governor Chiles's veto of the extracurricular activities bill, Brenda Dickinson and two other home-education leaders met with FHSAA Commissioner Ron Davis. The delegation wished to negotiate a bylaw change modeled after the vetoed legislation to allow individual home-educated students registered with the school district to participate in extracurricular activities at public and private schools and for home education support groups to join the FHSAA as member schools. Commissioner Davis did not want home education 'consortiums' to be able to participate because he felt it would prove to be an opportunity for countywide recruiting, potential abuse of the system, and an unfair advantage for home educators. However, he reluctantly suggested that we submit a proposed bylaw change to the FHSAA board.

Brenda Dickinson drafted a by-law proposal and submitted it to the FHSAA on July 23. The FHSAA executive board met on August 2, and decided to submit a different proposed by-law change to the full board on October 9, 1995 and the full membership in April. The by-law proposal by the FHSAA Executive Committee would have permitted home-educated students to participate in extracurricular activities ONLY at their zoned public school. The district school board would have had to approve the student's participation, and would have to set up guidelines by which the schools in its district could verify that home-educated students met the eligibility requirements of the FHSAA by-laws. There was no guarantee that the FHSAA Board or the member schools would approve this by-law change.

## THE GOVERNOR'S OFFICE TAKES ACTION

In the governor's office, numerous contacts from home education parents and students had raised awareness of the power wielded by the FHSAA. Governor Chiles instructed his director of legislative affairs to negotiate a compromise, hoping to avoid a veto override in the next legislative session.

Brenda Dickinson and several other home educators, along with an Alachua County School Board member and FHSAA Commissioner Ron Davis, met in the governor's office on September 14, 1995. Commissioner Davis presented all the reasons that home-educated students were not being allowed by the FHSAA to participate in extracurricular activities. Each home educator presented a different perspective. Glenda Jones shared how the FHSAA had barred home educated student participation in the state band festival, even though the Bandmasters Association had appealed to the FHSAA that the home school band be allowed to enter the competition. Ralph Ortega showed the inequity of the FHSAA by-laws which prevented his twin daughters to play fall volleyball for the public school which they entered in August because they had not been enrolled for an entire semester. Brian Code addressed the recruiting issue pointing out that his son had friends who had been recruited by a public school for a baseball program. Mr. Davis said that his Board did not have to negotiate with home educators and stated there was nothing he could do. The decision was up to the FHSAA board of directors and the membership. It was an eye-opener for the governor's office to see the power and inflexibility of this organization and garnered his support on behalf of future legislation.

Bob Muni, M.Ed. and HEF Vice-president, from Gainesville had worked with the Alachua County School Board to create an part-time open-door policy for home educated students to take classes in the public schools. The Alachua County School Board (ACSB) had petitioned the FHSAA to allow home-educated students who were taking classes at the public schools to participate in academic extracurricular activities. The FHSAA had formally denied their request at the meeting in the governor's office on September 14, 1995.

Mr. Muni attended the FHSAA Board of Directors on October 9 to address the proposed home education policy. The FHSAA board members, however, had already made their decision. The vote was 27 to 1 to prohibit home-educated students from participating in any extracurricular activities. The Board adopted a written resolution encouraging the principals of member schools to actively oppose any proposed changes in the FHSAA bylaws which would permit students not full- time enrolled in a member schools to participate in extracurricular activities.

## THE BATTLE TAKES ANOTHER TURN

Following the FHSAA Board's vote, Rep. Andrews, who wanted to assist home educators in their struggle against the all-too-powerful FHSAA, agreed to sponsor a bill which would place the FHSAA under the Dept. of Education. Rep. Andrews' bill was introduced in November 1995 and was the focus of the March 1996, FHSAA Bulletin encouraging members to support the bills, sponsored by Rep. Jerry Burroughs and Sen. John Grant, which would allow home educated students to participation in extracurricular activities. Home educators finally had the attention of the FHSAA.

After the meeting in the Governor's office, Rep. Buzz Ritchie, Speaker Pro Tempore; Rep. Allen Boyd, Chairman of the Rules and Calendar Committee; and Cynthia Chestnut, Chair of the Education Committee added their support to the legislation. These legislators met in Tallahassee with Brenda Dickinson, Bob Muni of Gainesville, Glenda Jones of Pensacola, and representatives of the FHSAA to negotiate the terms.

Rep. Chestnut invited Dr. Bob Hughes, Alachua County School Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent of Schools, Dr. Dan Boyd to assist in the mediation. (Dr. Hughes is now the Commissioner of the FHSAA and Dr. Boyd is an Associate Commissioner.) The presence of these men at the February 21 meeting was invaluable. The group was able to negotiate the terms of the bill which would accommodate

the participation of home educated students.

In light of the agreement reached in February, the FHSAA Board of Directors voted 33 to 1, on March 8, 1996, to change its bylaws to allow home-educated students to participate as individuals at public or private schools, or for home education cooperatives to join as member schools and form their own band or teams. This marked a significant victory. The legislation became law in May of 1996.