

Ask Mary:

I've had several requests from Georgia people to place this article on the website so they can copy and distribute it. Although the specific issue is one concerning Georgia, the overall issue of loss of control is a pertinent one no matter where you live in the country. I'm concerned that so many of the "old-timers" in the movement are starting to fade away, and being replaced by people who no longer remember the early legal struggles. It is not paranoia to recognize that the educational authorities would love to either do away with homeschooling or find a way to regulate it and get funding. Often, such attempts at stealing control from parents are disguised as positive measures: getting access to public programs, receiving scholarship assistance, getting free materials, making access to college easier, etc. We must actively resist such entanglements with the public system or we run the risk of losing all our control and making it harder for our own children to homeschool their kids someday. Feel free to use this article in any way you want in your own efforts to combat this tendency, provided that you use it in its entirety, without editing it in any way.

The Dangers of Accreditation

by Mary Hood, Ph.D.

As many of you know, I was the director of a home-schooling resource center in Kennesaw for many years. One of many reasons I shut down the center last June was that we were losing students to other places that claim to be "fully accredited". Since it has never been a requirement to be accredited in order to be admitted to Georgia colleges, this voluntary giving-away of parental control represents a very dangerous trend.

First of all, there is a large amount of misinformation floating around about what being "fully accredited" means. As an educational professional with a Ph.D. in education, I could personally start up something today that I could call an "accrediting agency for homeschoolers". The accreditation that I would offer, however, like any other accreditation, would not necessarily be worth the paper it was written on. The bottom line, for any such accreditation, are the questions, "Who is a program accredited by?", and "Who accepts this accreditation, and for what purpose?" In the south, there are really only a few accrediting agencies fully accepted by all colleges. The most prominent of these is the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). However, there have always been ways to enter college without such accreditation. It is true that "unaccredited" programs, including transcripts typed out by moms on a computer, will result in additional scrutiny of your portfolio, and, depending on the college, may cause inequitable treatment from the colleges. For those who are gallant enough to consider legal action, such treatment is clearly unconstitutional, based on the fourteenth amendment "equal protection of the laws clause". For those who are simply trying to get their students into college, however, remember that there are many routes to college. My own oldest son could not get directly into the

university system, due to his lack of academic records, but wound up going in as a transfer student after the successful completion of thirty credits at a private school. However, four of my own children got directly into private Christian colleges (Toccoa Falls College and Shorter College here in Georgia, and William Carey College in Hattiesburg, Mississippi), without any accreditation whatsoever, and many, many of the students in our unaccredited diploma program have successfully applied for both public Georgia universities and other private colleges across the nation.

A secondary criticism of “unaccredited programs” here in Georgia is the supposed inability of homeschooled students to get the Hope Scholarship. However, if you get into college and make a B average on your first thirty semester hours of work (generally one academic year) you get the scholarship retroactively, and keep it as long as you continue to get a B average in college. Do you want to throw away all of your control for a single tempting meal, like Esau did in the Bible?

One of the reasons I shut down the center was that, for the first time ever, I couldn't look someone in the eyes and state that accreditation made absolutely no difference. This was due to the fact that the Hope grant (for dual enrollment purposes) was starting to be given out to accredited programs, and not to unaccredited ones. (This is NOT the same thing as the Hope Scholarship.) Before you run out to get accredited based on this fact, however, consider this: This is just the start of a downward spiral in terms of loss of parental control. If enough of you submit voluntarily to such accreditation, sooner or later, it will be required, and no one will be able to get into college or receive the Hope Scholarship without it. To those of you who are new, trust me. This is not paranoia. Remember, I've been around since the start of the movement and have personally witnessed the early struggles. Several of my friends wound up in jail in the early years! Also, I have a Ph.D. in education, and travel around the country. I've personally seen the way other states have either watched their control gradually erode, or decided to fight the good fight and stand their ground!

Editor's note: March 8, 2008: I have just been told by a reliable source that the Hope grant is also available based on a standardized test score (Iowa or similar) that is less than 3 years old. WooHOO!!! One less reason for accreditation!!!

If you doubt me on this issue, call up the admissions office of several colleges and ask them what their requirements are for home-educated students. Ask them if students need to be accredited in order to be admitted. Do your own research. Find out who these supposed accrediting agencies really are, who are on the boards of directors, and why they were formed in the first place.

In order to completely understand the dangers of accreditation, it might help to consider the current situation at the college level. Because it is already commonly accepted that “full accreditation” of college programs is required, several Christian colleges are in danger of being run out of business. For example, certain Christian colleges, which believe strongly in resisting the

ways of the world, make a conscious decision to shun accreditation from the Southern Association. Since those colleges which have this accreditation are often not able to accept transfer credits from unaccredited schools, students may not be able to transfer from one school to another, including other Bible colleges, and may also have difficulty getting into certain graduate programs later.

For Christians who believe that they are responsible to God, rather than the government, this is already an unacceptable situation. and will only get worse if we start allowing ourselves to be concerned with accreditation on the high school level. Every time a homeschooling parent raises the issue of accreditation, every time a home-schooling group submits to accreditation, it brings us that much closer to a day when high school will be like college. Some of the current supposed “accrediting agencies” claim to make few demands upon the parents. That may be true right now, but they are getting their toe stuck in the door. Next it will be a foot, and then the whole leg. Sooner or later, if enough parents submit to such accreditation, none of us will be able to get into college without it. At that point, when we have lost our control over our education, I can promise you the demands will start. Among other things, once we have voluntarily submitted to accreditation, the next step will almost certainly be requiring SACS accreditation, which is virtually impossible to receive unless you are a bona fide school. At that point, Georgia parents will be in the same boat as many in other states, having to give up their control to educational professionals who may or may not understand the homeschooling scenario. What will come next? What about elementary and preschool? If we give up our freedom to educate our children in high school without accreditation, we will all pay for it someday.

I don't believe homeschooling will ever again be illegal in this country. We've grown too big. Only if a dictatorship arose could it ever again go away completely. However, if the educational establishment can sink its claws into the movement through the “accreditation process”, they won't have to make us go away. They will be able to control us, require all of us to get college degrees and/or certification in order to teach our own children, standardize our educational philosophies, standardize our textbooks, and eventually remove God from home education just like they've already tried to do in the secular schools. Is “accreditation” really that important to you?