

SO ... WHAT'S THE DEAL WITH THIS HOME SCHOOLING?

Last spring, at its annual retreat, the Network Board of Directors directed the staff to investigate issues surrounding education and home schooling, with an eye toward sponsoring legislation to assure that children in home schools are receiving basic education. The board's concerns included reports that some families are not providing any education for their children, that their decision to "home school" is really an easy way around truancy laws; reports that home-schooled children return to the public education system requiring remedial programs because the home schooling they have received is inadequate; and concerns that the home-school movement in Montana is dominated by the political right wing who consistently use home schooling (along with private schools) to advance their agenda to weaken the public education system.

All of this discussion was in the context of the Network's belief that every person is entitled to a basic education and that society has an obligation to assure that children are being educated. The Network board has been very concerned about the so-called parents' rights movement which advocates the idea that parents have absolute power over children. This movement has advocated abolition of numerous measures which protect children from abuse. The Network is firmly in support of the idea that society in general has an obligation to assure the health and safety of children. Home schooling and the lack of basic standards in Montana bring that issue into clear focus.

Network staff contacted the State Superintendent's office, local school board members, county superintendents and classroom teachers to discuss issues surrounding home schooling. Virtually all agreed that there are

significant problems with the home-school system in Montana. All said that there are some families doing a very good job of home schooling but others are simply not providing an education for their children. They also agreed that the home-school lobby is very well organized and that any effort to change the status quo would meet political defeat in the legislature. One individual who supported some kind of oversight said, "Well, you're picking the right hill to die on."

The Network also contacted Steve White, the current chair of the Montana Coalition of Home Educators, to see if there could be some agreement on a basic level of testing to assure that home-schooled kids are at least learning reading skills, math and other basic skills. White said that he was confident that home-schooled kids would perform well on such tests but felt it was the first step on a slippery slope to more and more onerous regulation of home schoolers. He said his organization would oppose any form of testing.

As the Network finalized its legislative agenda, the home school issue did not rise to a priority level. The Network will monitor bills which might apply to home schools and will suggest amendments to require that any regulations placed on the public education system be applied to home schools as well.

HALE REJECTED BY ILLINOIS BAR

Matt Hale, Pontifex Maximus of the racist World Church of the Creator (COTC), graduated from Southern Illinois University Law School in 1998 with a Juris Doctorate degree. Since Hale became the leader of COTC in 1996, he has worked to expand the organization—which is one of the country's most virulent white supremacist groups.

Unfortunately for Hale, in December 1998 his application to practice law was rejected by the Illinois Board of Admissions to the Bar. According to the January issue of COTC's newsletter, *The Struggle*, Judge Gregory McClintock stated, "The Bar of Illinois cannot certify someone as having good moral character and general fitness to practice law who has dedicated his life to inciting racial hatred for the purpose of implementing those [racial] views."