

# AHEM News

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Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts

What  
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## Current State Issues . . .

### Tips for Writing Your Education Plan

This time of year many homeschoolers are communicating with school officials, sending in evaluations for the past year, along with education plans for the coming year, and in some cases combining the two. Whether you're at work at that now, or planning on getting to it sometime soon, we thought it would be useful to draw your attention to Tips for Writing Your Ed Plan, information that is available on the AHEM website [www.AHEM.info](http://www.AHEM.info).

This web page contains guidelines for both new and experienced homeschoolers about Massachusetts requirements, as well as a link to a sample education plan which has been accepted in more than one town in Massachusetts, and a link to an overview of methods of evaluation.

As always we are available to answer questions as best we can, or to help you strategize in dealing with school officials. Happy reading!

### Tips for Writing Your Ed Plan

<http://www.ahem.info/TipsforWritingYourEdPlan.htm>

### Compulsory Attendance Statute

In Massachusetts, there is no statute specifically governing homeschooling. Rather, the Massachusetts Supreme Court upheld the compulsory attendance statute which states that, "Every child between the minimum and maximum ages established for school attendance by the board of education, ... shall, subject to section fifteen, attend a public day school in said town, or some other day school approved by the school committee,... but such attendance shall not be required of a child... who is being otherwise instructed in a manner approved in advance by the superintendent or the school committee." (Mass General Laws, Chapter 76, section 1)

### Minimum and Maximum Ages for School Attendance

The minimum age established for compulsory school attendance is six, maximum age is 16. From 603 CMR 8.00: Kindergartens: Minimum School Age Section 8.02:

Mandatory Minimum Age for School Attendance: Each child must attend school beginning in September of the calendar year in which he or she attains the age of six.

### Prior approval of homeschooling plans-overview

The *Charles* court decided that while parents "possess a basic right in directing the education of their children, such a right is not absolute but must be reconciled with the substantial State interest in the education of its citizenry... Thus, the school committee may enforce, through the approval process under G.L. c. 76, Sec. 1, certain reasonable educational requirements similar to those required for public and private schools." (*Charles* at 336)

### Guidelines for Approval of Home Education Plan in Massachusetts

In *Care and Protection of Charles et al.* (1987), the court recognized that certain factors may be considered by the superintendent or school committee in determining whether or not to approve a homeschool proposal:

1. the proposed curriculum, the length of the homeschool year and the number of hours of instruction in each of the proposed subjects
2. the competency of the parents to teach the children
3. access to the textbooks, workbooks, and other instructional aids to be used by the children and to the lesson plans and teaching manuals to be used by the parents
4. a form of assessment of the children to ensure educational progress and the attainment of minimum standards

### Practical Application of Charles and Brunelle Guidelines

Before submitting anything to your school district, it is a good idea to talk to local homeschoolers. You can probably find someone by contacting a support group near you. Or call your AHEM regional contact to find out details about the practice in your town.

While *Charles* does not specify that a homeschooling plan needs to be submitted annually, most towns expect annual plans.

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**Guideline 1: School officials may consider the subjects the child will study, the length of the homeschool year, and the hours of instruction in each subject.** While school officials may consider hours of instruction in each subject, they may not dictate the manner in which the subjects will be taught. (*Charles* at 339)

### In practice:

**Subjects the child will study:** G.L. c. 69, section 1D lists as core subjects mathematics, science and technology, history and social science, English, foreign languages and the arts. Subjects from Chapter 71 Sections 1 and 3 include orthography, reading, writing, the English language and grammar, geography, arithmetic, drawing, music, the history and constitution of the United States, the duties of citizenship, health education, physical education and good behavior.

To comply with this guideline parents can list subjects they plan to cover. A simple list of subjects should suffice, since the school is not allowed to dictate the manner in which you teach.

You may want to use key phrases or paragraphs that help to convey the flexible nature of homeschooling:

- “Topics may include, but shall not be limited to, the following:”
- “[Child’s name] will use a developmentally-appropriate, integrated curriculum. We will plan [his/her] learning together, based on [his/her] interests, so while it is impossible to state in advance which specific topical areas we will cover, we expect to cover the following subjects:”
- “We practice learner-directed education; [child’s name]’s course of study is based upon his/her interests. His/her range of interests is quite broad and his/her learning will be accomplished in that context. [child’s name]’s education is holistic as well – learning occurs in the context of and as part of normal life experiences. His ‘school year’ extends 365 days a year.”
- “The appended curriculum is a statement of things [child’s name] has learned and, based on that, of things s/he will continue learning during the year. Topics often mesh and activities and discussions reflect a wider picture than can be expressed in a list of isolated subjects.”

Needless to say, if you are following a boxed or self-made curriculum, you can simply outline what you plan to cover for the year, while still allowing for some degree of flexibility in your plan. If you do not want to write an outline, a photocopy of the table of contents from the curriculum should suffice.

**Length of the homeschool year:** While *Charles* states “...G.L. c. 71, Secs. 1 and 4 and 603 Code Mass.Reg. Sec. 27.01 (1980), require cities and towns to operate the public schools for a minimum of 180 days” it does not go so far as to state that the length of a homeschool’s year must be the same as a public school year. However, the path of least resistance in assuring that your plan will equal “in thoroughness and efficiency” the schools in the same town is to assert that your homeschool year will “meet or exceed 180 days.” Many homeschool families choose to write that their “homeschool year extends 365 days a year, easily exceeding the minimum 180 days of a public school.” In any case, note the length of your homeschool year, somewhere between 180 days and 365 days a year.

### Hours of instruction in each subject:

Parents may calculate hours of instruction based on the manner in which they homeschool, which does not have to replicate the public school’s offering, only equal it in “thoroughness and efficiency.” Keep in mind that the definition of “instruction” is loose and includes such activities as independent study, field trips, technology-assisted learning, and presentations by persons other

than teachers. Additionally, following a schedule is not an important consideration in a homeschool where “...the perception and use of time... are different.”

(*Michael Brunelle & others<sup>1</sup> vs. Lynn Public Schools* at 518)

Some parents write that they “will meet or exceed the 900 (elementary) or 990 (secondary) minimum hours of instruction.”

If school officials insist on more detail than this, submit an estimate of hours per subject per year, prefaced by a statement such as, “Because of the flexible nature of homeschooling, the following is necessarily an estimate of hours of instruction spent per subject” or “Due to the integrated nature of our curriculum, the following is a good faith estimate of number of hours of instruction per subject.” Or come up with your own caveat.

If you are interested in knowing how the public schools allocate their time, schools have curriculum guides that define how much time will be spent on each subject per week. These guides should be made available to you upon request.

Schools are not authorized to go so far as to ask for an hourly or daily schedule. If the school official is insisting on an hourly daily or weekly schedule, accompany the above with this quote from *Brunelle*: “While following a schedule may be an important consideration in a public school where preexisting schedules need to be maintained and coordinated, the perception and use of time in a home school are different. The plaintiffs can observe and accommodate variations (from child to child, subject to subject, day to day) in the learning process and teach through a process that paces each student.”

**Guideline 2: School officials may ask for information regarding “academic credentials or qualifications of the parent or parents who will be instructing the children.”** (*Charles*) “...[C]ertification would not appropriately be required for parents under a home school proposal... Nor must the parents have college or advanced academic degrees.” (*Charles* at 339) “General Laws c. 71, Sec. 1, provides that teachers shall be ‘of competent ability and good morals.’” (*Charles* at 339)

### In practice:

To comply with this parents can include one of the following in their education plan:

- “I am of competent ability and good morals.”
- Summarize your educational credentials.

Schools are not authorized to ask for the qualifications of “everyone” who will be teaching your child.

**Guideline 3: School officials may consider teaching materials,** but “only to determine subject and grade level... school officials may not... use this access to dictate the manner in which the subjects will be taught.” (*Charles* at 339)

The *Brunelle* court pointed out that “...some of the most effective curricular materials...may not be tangible. For example, travel, community service, visits to educationally enriching facilities and places, and meeting with various resource people, can provide important learning experiences apart from the four corners of a text or workbook.” (*Brunelle* at 518)

### In practice:

To comply with this guideline:

- You can write, “We will be using a variety of materials and resources, a list of which will be made available to the school department upon request” or
- list books and other resources that you will have available to you. (See example list below.)
- If you are using a set curriculum, then you can list the books and resources you will be following from that.
- If your school insists on more detail, photocopying the table of contents of a couple of key books will probably suffice.
- If after trying one or more of the above suggestions, you find yourself in the very unusual situation of having a school official who insists on actually seeing the books and materials, you could try quoting *Brunelle* at 518 (above), point out that your plan includes making great use of such intangible resources, and that the public library is accessible for anyone to visit during its hours of operation, where a sampling of the tangibles you have available to you can be found.

It is all a question of how to define “access” in this context; remember that approval can only be conditioned on requirements that are “essential to the State interest in ensuring that ‘all the children shall be educated.’” (*Charles* at 337) Since the majority of schools feel that a list of resources meets their need for access to teaching materials, and some are happy with less than that, it would be difficult to argue that physical access is “essential.”

#### Possible resources

- encyclopedias
- dictionaries
- atlases

- reference books and materials (such as textbooks, field guides, timelines, globe maps, etc.)
- newspapers
- magazines (including, but not limited to...)
- library loan books, tapes, magazines, etc.
- educational games
- educational computer software and on-line services
- calculating and measuring tools and utensils
- arts & crafts supplies
- writing supplies
- musical instruments
- audio-visual equipment and materials
- religious materials
- science lab equipment
- sports equipment
- gardening tools
- carpentry tools
- home maintenance equipment
- community resources (such as museums, stage performances, sports programs, private lessons, volunteer opportunities)

**Guideline 4: School officials and parents should agree on a method of evaluation that may include one of the following approaches:** standardized testing, periodic progress report, or dated work samples. Other methods of assessment, if mutually agreed upon by parents and school officials, are also allowed. Home visits may not be required as a condition of approval. See *Brunelle*.

### In practice:

Choose the one form of assessment that best fits your style of homeschooling, either testing, progress report or dated work samples. In your plan, include a sentence stating that you will provide this form of assessment once a year upon request.

Some families use different methods of assessment for different children.

### General considerations

We recommend conducting as much communication with school officials as possible in writing.

Once you have submitted a plan including information outlined by the guidelines in the *Charles* decision, you have fulfilled your responsibility to homeschool. Either hand deliver your plan to the school and ask for a receipt, or mail it certified mail, return receipt requested. It is not unheard of for schools to lose your paperwork, so it's good to have a copy of what you have submitted, and proof that you have submitted it. Depending on what town you live in, you may or may not hear anything from your school once you've

submitted your plan. If it is important to you to receive an approval letter, include a sentence such as, "We would appreciate a letter of approval from you" in your cover letter. Such proof of homeschooling can be used to receive discounts at various stores and museums, as well as student discounts for use of the MBTA.

From *Charles* at 338: "If the home school proposal is rejected, the superintendent or the school committee must detail the reasons for the decision. The parents must then be given an opportunity to revise their proposal to remedy its inadequacies. However, if the parents commence the education of their children at home in the face of the school committee's refusal to approve the parents' home school proposal, the burden of proof under G.L. c. 119 or G.L. c. 76, Sec. 2, shifts to the school committee to show that the instruction outlined in the home school proposal fails to equal "in thoroughness and efficiency, and in the progress made therein, that in the public schools in the same town..." G.L. c. 76, Sec. 1." In other words, if the school sees a problem with your plan, they must give you the opportunity to remedy it.

If, having submitted a plan, you begin homeschooling without approval, the school assumes the burden to show that your plan does not equal "in thoroughness and efficiency, and in the progress made therein, that in the public schools in the same town..." The most likely outcome in this situation, and the one that the *Charles* court recommended, is for "the parties... to proceed expeditiously in a serious effort to resolve the matter by agreement."

In the unlikely event that the school wants to take you to court, the huge expenditures for them to do so coupled with the fact that they would bear the burden of proof to show your plan is not adequate would most probably be a detriment, especially given the likelihood that a judge would recommend an expeditious resolution to remedy the situation.

If you have questions about any of the above, please do not hesitate to contact us here at AHEM.

- For contact info see <http://www.ahem.info/CountyContacts.htm>.
- For a sample education plan see <http://www.ahem.info/EDPlanSample.htm>.
- For sample progress reports, see <http://www.ahem.info/MethodsofEvaluation.htm>.

**"...approval can only be conditioned on requirements that are 'essential to the State interest in ensuring that 'all the children shall be educated.'"**

## Legislative Watch

AHEM has continued to track any legislation that has the potential to affect Massachusetts homeschoolers. The current legislative session will end in December of 2004. New legislation for the upcoming legislative session will be filed in December 2004 and January 2005.

AHEM is currently watching the following pieces of legislation:

- Senate Docket 2259: "An Act Relative to Home Education." This bill is still in docket stage and has not moved.
- House Docket 4568: A House bill that would raise the compulsory attendance age to 18. This piece of legislation is still in docket stage and has not moved.
- Senate Bill 1321: "An Act Providing for the Denial of Driver's Licenses to Truants." On March 20, 2004, this bill became part of a study order and on April 1, 2004, it was referred to the Ethics and Rules Committee. Most likely, this bill will run out of time during this legislative session. (See [www.ahem.info/TruancyLetter.htm](http://www.ahem.info/TruancyLetter.htm))
- House Bill 1825: "An Act to Improve Truancy Enforcement and Encourage School Attendance." On April 15, 2004, this bill was discharged to the House Rules Committee, which will probably schedule a debate on the House floor. After researching this piece of legislation, AHEM has determined it will not pose a threat to homeschoolers. (See [www.ahem.info/ArchivesH1825.htm](http://www.ahem.info/ArchivesH1825.htm))
- Senate Bill 278, a bill that would require school attendance until the age of 18. This bill, if passed, would require homeschoolers to continue to report to their local school districts until such time as the homeschoolers reach "graduation" or the age of 18, whichever comes first. On April 14, 2004, this piece of legislation, along with several other bills dealing with improving school attendance and decreasing the state's school dropout rate, became part of a new bill, HB4666, "An Act Relative to Ensuring That All Students Have Access to Educational Opportunities and Quality Learning Time." You can read the text of HB4666 at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/ht04666.htm>.

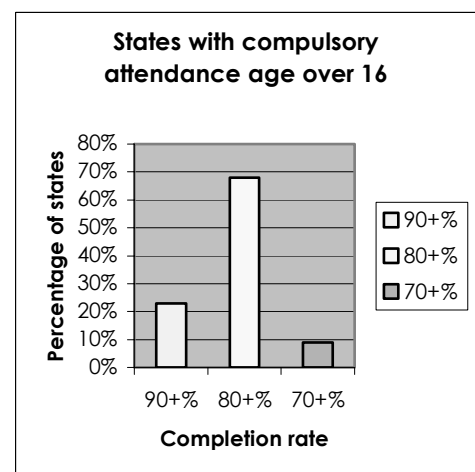
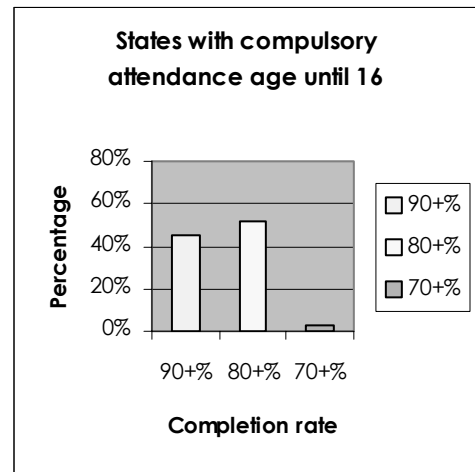
HB4666 includes the following:

SECTION 5 : .... The board shall establish the permissible and mandatory ages for school attendance; provided, that such mandatory ages shall be from the age of 6 to the age of 18, or

until graduation from high school, whichever occurs first.

This bill was reported favorably by the Committee on Education, Arts, and Humanities and has been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee. The House Ways and Means Committee will evaluate the bill in terms of cost to the Commonwealth.

This bill, if passed, would be ineffective in reducing the dropout rate, and would result in increased spending for school departments. Data aggregated from a three year period to calculate high school completion rates on a state-by-state basis (Dropout Rates in the United States: 2000, p. 22; National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, Doc. No. NCES 2002-114) merged with information about the age of compulsory attendance in each state shows that states requiring compulsory attendance until age sixteen have a higher average rate of school completion than those states requiring compulsory attendance until age seventeen or eighteen.



AHEM is recommending that anyone who has concerns about the passage of this bill should write to members of the House Ways and Means Committee. We believe your letter will be most effective if written from the position of a concerned taxpayer, rather than a homeschooler who wants to avoid more paperwork. In your letter, you may stress your objection to section 5, “since the financial ramifications that would result from extending the compulsory attendance age would include increased costs in teacher’s salaries, classrooms, and transportation. If this bill were likely to achieve the desired results, the cost/benefit analysis might justify these higher costs. However, since statistics show that raising the compulsory attendance age would not result in a higher rate of high school completion, the financial burden to taxpayers and already fiscally strapped school departments cannot be justified.”

You can find contact information for members of the House Ways and Means Committee at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/comm/h34.htm>.

AHEM will continue to monitor these pending bills, as well as any late filed legislation. We will keep you updated. You can also check [www.ahem.info](http://www.ahem.info) and click on Current News.

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## Homeschooling and Special Education

Homeschooling a special needs child can be a gratifying, rewarding, and successful venture. While many families with special needs children homeschool in Massachusetts and receive approval with relatively little difficulty, sometimes the approval process can present greater challenges for special needs families.

The question of whether schools can hold special needs children to a higher standard when approving a homeschool plan is still open. It has not been addressed in a statute or court case. This is one reason that parents of special needs children often find themselves in murky waters when seeking approval to homeschool. While some officials argue that the “equal in thoroughness and efficiency” standard means that homeschooling parents with special needs children must provide Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), others feel that once an Individual Education Plan (IEP) is rejected, FAPE no longer applies.

If your child has never been to school, the path of least resistance is to not have him tested or labeled as special

needs by the public school, and submit a home education plan according to the *Charles* guidelines. If your child already has an IEP in place, getting approval to homeschool can sometimes be more challenging.

Some parents who decide to exercise their right to reject an IEP and choose to homeschool feel they do not have to address the IEP in any way in their education plan since they are no longer in the school environment. The reason this assumption sometimes meets with opposition on the part of school officials is explained in the *Parent’s Rights Brochure*: If you refuse your consent to the IEP, “in most cases your refusal to consent will be fully honored. However, to protect the rights of your child, the law requires the school district to consider the effect of your refusal on the child. At any point *after your child is first placed in a special education program* (emphasis added), if a school district believes your refusal to consent would deny your child a free appropriate public education (FAPE), the school district must take steps to ensure that FAPE is provided...The school district cannot request a hearing to dispute your refusal to consent to the initial evaluation or initial placement of your child in special education.” In other words, if the school does not think your home education plan adequately addresses your child’s special needs as outlined in the IEP, and they believe that FAPE applies to homeschools as well as public schools, they fear they will be held liable if they don’t take steps to make sure that FAPE is provided.

Often, families choosing to homeschool a child who has been identified by the school as having special needs want to find a way to put the school’s concerns to rest, receive approval, and go about the business of homeschooling. If parents choose to work with the school in this way, the goal is to show the school as specifically as possible that they are addressing the child’s needs through homeschooling, and that they have carefully considered the recommendations of the IEP and either found a way to address them or set them aside because they don’t apply to the homeschooling environment. For example, in rejecting an IEP parents can explain in their education plan that they will be providing recommended services through homeschooling (though not necessarily through the specific channels the school advises). Parents may also communicate that some programs recommended in the IEP are not applicable to homeschooling, because outside the school environment those particular special needs will not be present. For example, an IEP recommending a behavioral program for a student with ADHD may be relevant for that student to succeed in

the school environment, but in the homeschooling environment, the needs of the student will change and the recommendations of the IEP would not apply.

Sometimes the choice to homeschool a special needs child comes after dissatisfaction with the services the school is providing. In these cases, the potentially contentious history between family and school can create barriers to receiving homeschool approval. The option of addressing the special needs in the homeschooling plan may provide a reasonable way for the family to get approval in such cases. Consulting with or using a special education advisor or advocate can help parents learn how to speak the school language, compile documentation, and package their plan in an optimal way. If the school requests meetings or hearings, parents need to make decisions about whether and how to attend them. SPED advocates can help in these cases, too. Advocates are many times less expensive than lawyers. While a lawyer may be required in an extreme case, there is every chance that with careful planning, thinking, and advice, parents can negotiate the potentially rocky road of the approval process themselves, with the help of a SPED advocate, and/or with guidance from experienced homeschoolers. The value of conversing with other homeschool families who've been through the process, especially in your own town, should not be underestimated, either.

There are any number of reasons that schools will choose to make a fuss about approving a homeschool plan for a special needs child, and keeping those in mind may make the process easier to navigate.

- One reason, as stated earlier, may be the potentially contentious history between the school and the family. If this is the primary reason, defusing emotional and charged interaction with reasonable, carefully thought out actions may help.
- Schools are required by law to identify special needs children and meet their needs. While parents retain the right to reject services, schools may fear that in the long run, their approval of a homeschool plan will make them somehow liable for failing to see the child's needs are met. In this case, the primary motivation of the school is to ensure that the needs are met, and keeping that in mind when creating a plan may help ease the approval process.
- If you find yourself in a serious conflict with the school, remember that the hearing process can be quite costly to already financially overburdened school systems. Sometimes an effective approach is to point out to school officials that the wisdom of expending significant funds on attorney fees and

hearing costs, when the family has presented a plan that is educationally sound and will relieve the school of the burden of providing services, is questionable at best. Also, keep in mind that your local school committee, as elected officials, may be helpful in this situation.

- Parents who want to homeschool a special needs child and receive services from the school may encounter resistance. Special education costs are not fully reimbursed by the state and the special education budget cannot be cut by reducing services. However, it *can* be cut by providing needed services more efficiently. Parents of children with special education needs may benefit by asking themselves how having agreed upon services delivered by the school can be cost efficient when a child is homeschooled. Parents may also need to be flexible about when and where the services are provided if the school is delivering them. In cases where the SPED services required in a town exceed the SPED budget, the school must cut other services or implement layoffs in order to provide the SPED services. This can cause quite a bit of resentment all around. Parents who are simply fighting for services their child is entitled to receive are not at fault, of course. But understanding the issues at stake can help the efforts of parents who want to homeschool but also want their child to receive services.
- It's also important to remember that in cases where services are provided, the school officials may feel they have the right to exercise more control over the child's education than the parent wants to grant them.

Homeschooling and special needs can go hand in hand. There are many success stories of special needs children thriving in a homeschooling environment. If parents feel homeschooling is the best choice for their child, they should not be discouraged by horror stories about how school systems in Massachusetts have handled requests to homeschool special needs children. Navigating the approval process with these special circumstances may or may not be more challenging than undergoing it without having your child identified as having special needs. Parents of children with special needs enrolled in school can also have difficulties with schools regarding special education and homeschoolers are probably not being singled out. Parents can improve their chances of successful interaction with the schools by making educated, well thought out choices and by trying to determine if there is any way both parties can "win" in a SPED dispute between homeschool parents and the

school administration. If help is needed, there are many resources available (see box).

## Glossary<sup>1</sup>

**IDEA (Individuals with Disabilities Act):** The federal special education law,... grounded on six basic principles [among them FAPE and IEP].

**FAPE:** Under federal law, students who are eligible for special education are entitled to a Free Appropriate Public Education. The FAPE standard for special education services requires the school district to provide instruction tailored to the individual student's needs, with sufficient support services to assist the student to make meaningful educational progress. Any special education services identified for the student are required to be provided at public expense with no cost to the parent...

**IEP (Individual Education Program):** a written document developed by a Team [which includes parental participation] that describes the programs and services that are needed and that will be provided when a student has been determined to be eligible for special education. [Parental] permission will always be requested before any IEP services are provided.

## Resources

*(compiled by Jane Kontoff)*

- [www.spanmass.org](http://www.spanmass.org) Special Needs Advocacy Network
- [www.masspac.org](http://www.masspac.org) Massachusetts Parent Advisory Councils
- [www.fcsn.org](http://www.fcsn.org) Federation for Children with Special Needs
- [www.concordspedpac.org](http://www.concordspedpac.org) Concord MA Parent Advisory Council
- [www.idonline.org](http://www.idonline.org) Learning Disabilities Online
- [www.uniquelygifted.org](http://www.uniquelygifted.org) Uniquely Gifted: Resources for Gifted Children with Special Needs

## Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers . . .

### Living, Learning, and Loving It

Eric McDonald is a 17 year old homeschooler who lives in Medford. He is the son of one of AHEM's founders, Milva McDonald. As you will see from reading this interview with him, Eric has a multitude of interests that

include nature photography, music, birding, writing, and studying wildlife. He has taken advantage of the plethora of community resources that are available to homeschoolers as a way to further his vocational and educational goals.

### Have you ever been to school?

Yes, but only when I was very young. I went to private school for first and second grade, but I basically feel like I've been homeschooling all my life.

### How long have you been homeschooling?

Since I was seven. I'm 17 now... so I guess that would make it ten years... Yeah, it does.

### While homeschooling, have you followed a set curriculum, or your own interests?

I never really followed a set curriculum. We tried that in the beginning, but to be honest, I was kind of a hyperactive kid. All I really wanted to do was run around. It became really difficult for me and my parents to work together on a regular basis. So we sort of did the "school" thing when we felt like it, and other than that, I was pretty much free to roam. So I guess you could say I followed my own interests.

### What are your current interests?

I have tons. The two main ones are music and anything that has to do with nature and animals. I've been playing guitar for about three years now, and I just picked up mandolin a few months ago. I'm in two bands right now. One is my rock band, Waka Waka, and the other is my acoustic band, Iridium, which just got together recently. I also play in the Family Folk Chorale (along with the rest of the members of Iridium). I've written a couple string pieces, with the guidance of my guitar/singing/composition/everything teacher Chris Eastburn. One of them was performed in Canada at Port Milford, by some very accomplished high school string players, and the other was read by the Tufts Chamber Orchestra recently. I'm pretty sure that one went back to Canada, too.

I spend most of my week volunteering/interning at two different AZA (American Zoo and Aquarium Association) accredited institutions (Museum of Science, Boston and Drumlin Farm) where I get to work with the most incredible animals: Snakes, mammals, amphibians, invertebrates, and – my favorite – birds from all over the world. I clean all of those cages, prepare all of those diets, and do educational programs with all of those animals. On the weekend, I disappear into a world of birds. I'm insane when it comes to bird-watching. I've been doing it for about a year-and-a-half and have seen almost three hundred different species of birds, the most recent being a North American first, a Red-footed

<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts Department of Education *Parent's Rights Brochure*



Falcon. I'm a member of the Menotomy Bird Club and the American Birding Association, and I lead bird walks at Drumlin Farm as a docent, as well as teaching about birds and other animals' natural history. I'm also a nature photographer, and I hope to be called a "pro" someday. I mainly take pictures of birds, but butterflies, mammals and landscapes are also common subjects of mine. Check out my website (which I designed myself) at <http://www.ericmcdnld.com>.

**What do you see yourself doing ten years from now?**

This is a tough question, because I could see myself doing so many things. I think, most likely, I'll be working at some kind of nature preserve or museum, doing education and taking pictures. There are so many other things I want to do, though. I want to write for, or maybe even publish, a magazine focused around the nature of New England, I want to be in bands, I want to work with animals, I want to do... so many things. It will be really hard to narrow it down. I feel like I'm going in a certain direction, I just couldn't tell you exactly where. Hopefully that will come to me.

**Describe how your current activities will help you get to where you want to be ten years from now?**

There are three things I have to say to that. One is, right now, my college resume looks great in a lot of ways. I've put in over 1,500 hours of community service in the last two years, and I already have college credits for the courses I've been taking at Harvard Extension. The second is, right now, I'm learning the skills I feel I need that I can't learn in college. I'm getting first rate experience working with animals, I'm in working situations with people the same age, younger and significantly older than me, I'm learning how to work in social groups. Those are just a few examples. The third reason is that I'm doing what I love to do in a productive way, and if that doesn't take me to where I want to be, then I don't want to get there.

**Do you have any plans for college?**

Yeah, I've looked at a few schools. One program I was pretty gung ho for was the Moorpark College's Exotic Animal Training and Management Program. I know you've never heard of that. Moorpark College is actually a Community College in the most unpopulated area of Southern California. But it's a great program, and it's got a good reputation in the field of animal care. What I'm probably going to do now, though, is enroll in the Harvard Extension School's degree program, and get at least an AA, then take it from there.



*Tree Swallow*

Photo by Eric McDonald

**What has been most helpful to you in learning what you need to know for your future career?**

Undoubtedly working at the Museum of Science and Drumlin Farm. As a volunteer and intern, I was treated as an equal to the adult employees. They had the same expectations for me as they did for any member of their staff. OK, maybe not quite the same, but regardless, I had to step up, and it taught me a lot about the world.

**How has homeschooling made it possible for you to pursue your interests, and would this be possible if you were in school?**

Homeschooling's made it possible because it gives me the freedom to design my own schedule. It gives me the freedom to learn things that are related to what I want to do. I couldn't really tell you if it would be possible in school, because I've never thought about it. All I can say is that homeschooling has worked out great for me, and I can guarantee that all the people I know who go to school (which is quite a few) don't even have the time to think about what they want to do in the future, or if they do, how to get themselves there.

I couldn't really see what kind of person I'd be like if I hadn't been homeschooled. It's definitely part of my identity, and it has most definitely helped me find my calling, interests, passions... whatever you want to call them. Homeschooling has helped me get there, and that has made it worth it for me.

## Clearing our throats . . .

### Dichotomy Debunked

On August 15, 2004, an article titled "Reading, Writing, and Right Wing Politics" ran in the "Ideas" section of *The Boston Globe*. The story, written by reporter Steve Grove, picked up on recent national press about the political activism of the Home School Legal Defense

Association (HSLDA) and its offshoots, Generation Joshua and Patrick Henry College. Grove writes: "As 'George Bush's secret army' (as *The Economist* recently dubbed conservative homeschoolers) girds itself for battle, it's worth asking why an equal and opposing army of liberal homeschoolers hasn't risen up to meet them."

By imagining that homeschoolers fall into the simple political dichotomy of conservative and liberal, Grove perpetuates a myth that plagues the homeschooling movement. He does rightly point out that with approximately 81,000 members, HSLDA represents fewer than 10 percent of homeschoolers. (Additionally, it's not a certainty that all those members espouse the religious and political views of HSLDA; there is no way to know how many people pay HSLDA solely for what they incorrectly believe is "legal insurance.")

In his discussion of the composition of the homeschooling movement, Grove points out that the US Department of Education reports that the majority of people choosing to homeschool do not do so for religious reasons. Yet he goes on to cast doubt on that by stating that "other studies have estimated that evangelicals make up as much as 70 percent of all homeschoolers." Unfortunately, he fails to cite these studies, note who conducted them, or examine how the data were collected. Grove also quotes author Mitchell Stevens, whose 2001 book *Kingdom of Children* says about homeschooling that, "one would be hard-pressed to find a social movement peopled by a wider spectrum of faiths and philosophies." But alas, even Stevens chooses to divide homeschoolers into two camps: The conservative Christian group he terms the "believers," and the rest he calls "inclusives." Thus he relegates Catholics, Muslims, Jews, pagans, atheists, agnostics, left liberals, moderate liberals, moderate conservatives, Native Americans, libertarians, many Christians, and the many other types of people who comprise the homeschooling movement into one single group.

Despite the inconclusive information about the distribution of religious practices among homeschoolers, there are some things we can know for sure. HSLDA, through its political activism and connections, and through its creation of programs like Generation Joshua and its launching of Patrick Henry College, has a great deal of political influence. It has also, especially of late, received much media coverage, coloring the perception of homeschooling for people who don't personally know any homeschoolers. Thus the bias in reporting coverage of HSLDA may have contributed to a public perception

that most homeschoolers are conservative Christians--even in the face of a statistic stating that HSLDA actually represents fewer than 10 percent of homeschoolers. By focusing on HSLDA so heavily, Grove's article may contribute to the misperception that most homeschoolers are right-wing conservatives willing to use homeschooling to further their political viewpoints.

There is no doubt that this is true of HSLDA. Grove quotes HSLDA President Michael Farris: "We believe that some day homeschooled young people will help reverse *Roe v. Wade* [and] stop same-sex marriage . . ." Generation Joshua is an HSLDA-created program that sends homeschooled students on the campaign trail in support of conservative candidates. Patrick Henry College in Virginia aims to place its mostly homeschooled students and graduates in political positions in Washington. The tendency of the media and authors to portray HSLDA as an entire faction of the homeschooling movement, rather than a hierarchical organization, can even lead to the false notion that all Christian homeschoolers support their agenda, and that no diversity of opinion exists among Christian homeschoolers. Retta Dunlap of Vermont is only one conservative Christian homeschooler quoted in the Grove article who disagrees with bringing her political views on non-homeschooling issues into her homeschooling activism, but undoubtedly there are others.

Grove wonders why a liberal counterpart to HSLDA hasn't sprung up in the homeschooling movement. Perhaps the answer lies in the simple fact that homeschooling has nothing to do with the issues HSLDA has connected it to, such as gay marriage and abortion. Most politically active homeschoolers, regardless of their religious or political views, stick to issues that have to do with homeschooling. Because homeschooling is a matter for each individual state, this doesn't happen often on a national level. The nitty-gritty work being done by state homeschooling groups to preserve homeschooling freedoms and address homeschooling issues is significant, but not very attractive to the media.

While Grove points out Stevens's argument that the "inclusives" find it difficult to organize politically because of their ideas about autonomy and grassroots democracy, he fails to understand that it is these very ideas, and the fact that they prefer not to mix causes, that *keeps* most homeschoolers from *wanting* to organize politically in the way HSLDA does. As a rule, homeschoolers organize politically when the need arises

to protect homeschooling freedoms. In that capacity, the “inclusives” are very effective.

Out in the world, there are hundreds of thousands of homeschooled students engaging in activities too numerous to list. While Generation Joshua homeschoolers make news for hitting the campaign trail, the much larger majority of homeschooled students are engaged in enriching lives, making contributions to society, and participating in civic activities in their own communities through jobs and volunteerism that cut a wide swath across political, religious, social, and academic spectrums. These actions may not be sensationalistic, but here, in the voices of homeschooled young people, inspiring and fascinating stories could be found were the media to look.

By jumping on the media bandwagon following HSLDA, Grove fails to give equal time to the work that other homeschooling groups and other homeschoolers have done and are doing. By focusing on HSLDA, he may perpetuate in some people’s minds the misconception that most homeschoolers are conservative Christians looking to push a political agenda, and he leaves the vast majority of the homeschooling movement an undefined, undescribed, unrepresented population in the public mind.

Let us remember that homeschoolers are more than just “believers” and “inclusives.” As parents, we are a tremendously diverse group of people with one commonality: we are all exercising and protecting our individual right to educate our own children. As children and young adults, we are pursuing individual paths to becoming educated, responsible, and contributing citizens. Under these circumstances, the media’s generalizing, a practice sometimes necessary for discussion but always to be undertaken with care, cannot productively address deeper issues of homeschooling. When faced with questions about the nature of homeschoolers, we must emphasize the political, religious, philosophical, and social diversity that characterizes the movement. We must encourage media portrayals of homeschoolers that accurately reflect our diversity. And we must maintain our group strength by focusing on homeschooling, the commonality we all share, and not involve homeschooling in political issues that have nothing to do with homeschooling.

## Law Made Easy . . .

### Homeschooling in the Northeast: New Hampshire

Often, it seems as though Massachusetts is portrayed as a state with very stringent homeschooling requirements. Aspects of the *Charles* guidelines, such as prior approval and local oversight, are sometimes bemoaned as making life difficult and confusing for homeschoolers. While the *Charles* guidelines do leave some areas of ambiguity that can be challenging for homeschoolers and schools to navigate, we thought an examination and comparison of homeschooling regulations in surrounding states might help Massachusetts homeschoolers get a clearer picture of where our state falls along the continuum of states considered “easy” or “difficult” in which to homeschool. We start the series in this edition of the newsletter by examining the homeschooling regulations of our “Live Free or Die” neighbor to the north, New Hampshire.

In New Hampshire, as in Massachusetts, compulsory attendance is required from ages six to sixteen. To begin homeschooling, a parent must choose an agency to oversee the homeschool program, referred to as the “participating agency.” Parents have three options: the commissioner of education, the district superintendent, or the principal of a non-public school. While not many non-public secular schools are participating agencies, several Christian schools participate in this way, mostly overseeing homeschooling programs of Christian homeschoolers. The 1990 law, RSA 193-A, did away with “prior approval” but on or before the date that the homeschooling program will begin, parents must provide name, address, telephone number, and child’s date of birth to the participating agency.

Parents then have 30 days from the commencement of the home education program to submit a curriculum to the participating agency. The required subjects in New Hampshire are science, math, language, government, health, reading, writing, spelling, the history of the United States and New Hampshire constitutions, and art and music appreciation. Parents must include the name of the curriculum that will be used *or* the name of the correspondence school if any, as well as a list of instructional materials including the scope and sequence of instruction in each subject. This information must be submitted annually. New Hampshire notification requirements appear to exceed what Massachusetts homeschoolers are required to submit in their home education plans.

### Faces at AHEM

Erin Matica lives in Hamilton with her husband Daniel and four children: William (9), Paul (6), Ann (4), and Sam (19 months). Erin graduated from nursing school in 1993 and married Daniel that same year. She worked as an oncology nurse for about a year and a half while living in Connecticut. After finding out she was pregnant, they moved back to the north shore to be closer to Erin's family.

Erin became involved with La Leche League and through League became acquainted with many homeschoolers. After reading John Holt's *Teach Your Own*, subscribing to *Growing Without Schooling*, and talking to many unschoolers, Erin and Daniel decided that they would homeschool when their oldest child was about a year and a half old.

Besides living and learning out in the world with her husband and children, Erin has interests in sustainable farming and living, traditional diets and nutrition, and old timey crafts such as spinning and knitting. Some of her most recent endeavors include: learning to grow and use medicinal herbs and studying the history of Newfoundland dogs. The Maticas plan on adding a Newfoundland puppy to the family in the near future.

Erin enjoyed being part of the AHEM Conference Committee and looks forward to helping out on special projects in the future.

### State House Visit

One of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts's organizational goals is to encourage self-advocacy and legislative awareness. Cultivating relationships at the State House is a key component to achieving this goal. In developing these relationships, we will have a base of state legislators to work with in the event of a legislative challenge to homeschooling. To this end, AHEM sponsors periodic State House field trips throughout the year. During a typical visit, the group tours the State House with a guide who details the historical significance of the building. An important element of these visits is a group meeting with a state senator or representative. For representative government to work, we need active participants. We strongly encourage families to participate in these events.

Advocates for Home Education will sponsor a State House visit on Thursday, October 14th, at 11:00 AM.

Parents have to keep a portfolio of their child's work, which must include a log of reading materials, writing samples, and worksheets. These portfolios must be kept for two years. In addition to the portfolio, homeschoolers must submit a form of evaluation to the participating agency. Annual evaluations must be submitted by July 1<sup>st</sup>. Homeschoolers have three evaluation options: an evaluation done by any teacher teaching full time in a New Hampshire non-public school or by a certified public school teacher, *or* results of standardized test or state student assessment test, *or* another form of assessment mutually agreed upon by the parents and the participating agency. If one submits an unfavorable evaluation, the home education program is put on probation and the family has one year to produce a favorable evaluation. If standardized testing is used, the child must achieve a composite score of at least 40%. If, after one year, the family is unsuccessful in submitting a favorable evaluation, the homeschooling family is subject to a hearing, which may require an attorney; at stake is their ability to continue homeschooling.

Although New Hampshire regulations allow for an alternative "mutually agreed upon" form of evaluation, in practice this alternative is chiefly available to Christian homeschoolers using Christian schools as their participating agency. Secular private schools do not commonly choose to act as participating agencies for homeschoolers, for the most part leaving secular homeschoolers to deal with the commissioner of education, or their district superintendent (as in Massachusetts); their evaluation options are effectively limited to standardized testing or a progress report prepared by a certified public school teacher or a teacher teaching in a non-public school setting. Comparatively, Massachusetts homeschoolers may use work samples as their sole method of evaluation, and there is no requirement to maintain a portfolio. Those Massachusetts homeschoolers that opt for a progress report as their method of evaluation are able to write the progress report themselves, without any input from a teacher who may not even know the child being evaluated.

To read about the *Charles* decision in layman's terms, see <http://www.ahem.info/CharlesinBrief.htm> or "*Law Made Easy: Charles, in Brief*," *AHEM News*, v. 1, n. 2, Winter 2004, p. 9.

Children are welcome. Our tour will begin promptly at 11:00 AM, so please plan to meet in Doric Hall (2nd floor) at 10:45 AM. If there is a legislative session going on that day, we will be able to sit in for part of the session. We will meet with Representative Marzilli.

Participants are encouraged to contact your own senator or representative and let them know you will be visiting the State House on October 14th. Your legislator will arrange to come down and meet with your family. They are always very enthusiastic about meeting constituents. Visit [www.ahem.info/ContactInfoforFedStateLocalReps.htm](http://www.ahem.info/ContactInfoforFedStateLocalReps.htm) for contact info for your representative.

Space is limited so please RSVP to [info@AHEM.info](mailto:info@AHEM.info) or call Cheryl Pinto at 978-532-5778 to sign up. Notice of State House field trips is given to those on the Friends of AHEM list first, then sent out to local homeschooling support groups, space permitting, and posted on our Events page.

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## Field Trip to The Lord of the Rings Motion Picture Trilogy - The Exhibition at the Boston Museum of Science

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts field trip on Thursday, September 16th, 2004 at 11:15 AM to the Museum of Science in Boston. We will meet in the main lobby at 10:45 AM.

**Timed entry;** usually takes one to two hours to see the Exhibit depending on interest. The website below has a teacher's guide and lots of other information.

**Tickets:** \$8.25 per person any age and \$5 per teacher (only one per family). Children under two are free. This includes entrance to the museum for the day and the special timed Lord of the Rings Exhibition. (For comparison the MoS everyday prices are \$19 for anyone 12 and over, three to 12 yrs are \$16.)

**Parking** is \$3 per car payable at the museum. No strollers allowed.

**If you want to go:** Send a check for the appropriate amount to Amy Davies, 41 Traincroft, Medford, MA 02155, made out to Amy Davies. Please include the number of children and adults, and your email (or phone number) in case she needs to contact you. Space is limited, so send your check, **postmarked no later than September 1**, to avoid disappointment. No refunds after August 31st.

Email [FieldTrips@AHEM.info](mailto:FieldTrips@AHEM.info) for more information or call Amy at 781-393-8285.

## This summer travel to Middle-earth...

The exhibition features hundreds of pieces of memorabilia from the epic film trilogy including original costumes and jewelry, as well as the One Ring. Immersed in film props, visitors can explore the groundbreaking technology used in the films such as computer-generated special effects and animatronics, and hear from cast, crew, and director in exclusive "behind-the-scenes" interviews shown on videos throughout the exhibit.

The exhibit includes massive models, an "armor corridor," and a display on prosthetics including Hobbit feet and Orc teeth. An interactive scaling activity reveals how filmmakers can make the actors appear to be tiny Hobbit-sized or large wizard-sized, using an ingenious mix of trick photography, forced perspectives, and props made at different scales. Visitors can also see themselves transformed as Hobbit or wizard-sized in their own photo.

The exhibit was developed by the Museum of New Zealand Te Papa Tongarewa in partnership with New Line Cinema, the producers of the film trilogy. Following its run at the Science Museum in London on January 11, 2004, the exhibit will show in Singapore before coming to the Museum of Science, Boston in August 2004. The next city on the tour after Boston is Sydney.

This exhibition was made possible through the support of the New Zealand Government. For more information on the exhibition please visit [www.mos.org/lotr](http://www.mos.org/lotr). Field trip participants will be added to the Friends of AHEM list unless they specifically opt out.

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## AHEM in the News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (AHEM) was highlighted as a support group in *Home Education Magazine's* June Support Group News. Read the interview below.

## HEM SUPPORT GROUP NEWS - June 2004

### JUNE'S HIGHLIGHTED SUPPORT GROUP

This month it was my pleasure to speak to Milva McDonald, one of the founders and coordinators of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (AHEM). AHEM has grown and served many home-educators in MA in their first year, including having just hosted their first conference! Many thanks for taking the time to share with us Milva!

The interview:

### **Why did you start a group?**

Two other homeschooling parents and I had been thinking about starting a state group for awhile. We had a vision of an advocacy organization that would support grassroots homeschooling and the right to homeschool independently. We see building relationships with legislators and watch dogging the state house as important ways to protect our homeschooling freedoms, and this is something that had fallen by the wayside in Massachusetts.

### **How did you set the group up?**

The three of us talked about our initial goals, and set up an open house to introduce the group about a year ago. We came up with three branches to cover areas that other homeschooling groups in the state weren't addressing. Our three major goals were connecting with legislators and keeping an eye on legislative issues, creating a database about homeschooling policy and practice in our state, and offering phone support for dealing with school systems. Of course, a major focus has been to build our numbers. We've done pretty well, making it well into the hundreds in our first year, but we plan to increase that number significantly.

### **What do you feel is the most valuable information you share with new folks? With veterans?**

On the state level, our thrust has been to educate homeschoolers about existing state law, help them understand it, and offer support in dealing with school officials. I think sharing information about how the law works here is pretty important for both new and established folks. It's not black and white, since we don't have a statute. Homeschooling oversight is based on case law and regulation is at the local rather than state level, so there are a lot of gray areas. Different towns can and do operate differently. It's vital that homeschoolers understand the law and make informed decisions about dealing with the schools, because over compliance can lead to problems for all of us. As far as veteran homeschoolers, we share information about legislative issues and challenges, as well as inform them of national issues such as We Stand for Homeschooling. [www.westandforhomeschooling.org](http://www.westandforhomeschooling.org)

We just celebrated our first year in existence with an event attended by about 150 people. Andy Migner, a well-known and well-loved veteran homeschooling parent, gave a talk, which was followed by a screening of Peter Kowalke's *"Grown Without Schooling."* <http://www.grownwithoutschooling.com>

The movie generates quite a variety of responses. It felt really good to gather with a bunch of homeschoolers and discuss the issues raised in the film. And it felt

really good to look back on our first year and take stock of our accomplishments. We've visited the State House with groups of homeschoolers three times, tracked and reported on a number of bills with the potential to affect homeschooling families, compiled a good amount of information for our database, and offered phone support to homeschoolers in need. We also publish a newsletter, which has been really fun. All our writing about state and national issues is archived on our website (<http://www.ahem.info>). We also have some other fun stuff there, including a section of links to websites created by homeschoolers. So check it out!

**AHEM website tip:** We have a support group page which is sorted geographically for ease in locating homeschoolers who live close to you. If you have a support group that you'd like to list, we'd love to; send us an email and be sure to include: Group Name, Web URL, Contact Person\*, E-mail Contact\* and/or Phone\*, City/Town\*, State\*, Zip code\*, County\*, Primary Area Served\* (*starred items are required*). Also, tell us if you would like AHEM emails to be sent to the email address (preferred) or to the street address, for sharing with support group members. There is also a downloadable form available at [www.ahem.info](http://www.ahem.info) that you can print out and return to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474, if you prefer.

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## **Can We Help?**

We're reaching out to support group leaders or otherwise homeschool outreach people. If you are like us, at this time of year you're experiencing a flood of inquiries regarding getting started homeschooling. In the interest of helping both local support networks and potential new homeschoolers, we at Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts have a couple of ideas we'd like to propose.

- A treat that we homeschoolers experience during the "Back-to-School" season is the feeling of heading off to a beach or park on a glorious September day when the rest of the world has settled back into closeting themselves indoors at school again. If your group hosts a "Not-Back-to-School" event at which you'd welcome newcomers, we invite you to send details about it to list on our Events page.

We hope to get enough listings to warrant a designated page – it would be fun and inspirational to see the myriad of events that take place across Massachusetts this time of year, from Cape Cod homeschoolers heading to the beach to Western Mass homeschoolers atop of mountains, (or

go ahead – break the stereotype!) and everything in between.

- If you would find it helpful, AHEM would be happy to provide you with copies of our pamphlet which introduces AHEM and has information on how to get started homeschooling in Massachusetts. While we are not in the business of recruiting people to homeschooling, it is in all of our best interests that those who choose this path are well informed about MA homeschool guidelines. These pamphlets would be appropriate to hand out at informal gatherings like a picnic or park days, at support meetings, information nights, or mailed to individuals who contact you looking for more information. The pamphlet format allows for a few to be stashed in a glove compartment or backpack so that they're on hand when you need them. If you'd like some, email [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info) or call 781-641-0566 with name, address and number of pamphlets desired.

We appreciate that sometimes the role of support person is thrust upon otherwise busy homeschoolers, and we hope that by partnering with you we can help to make that role, whether warmly embraced or not, a bit easier.

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## Homeschooling Program at Seekonk Public Library

In June, Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts presented "Homeschooling: A How-To Workshop for Adults" at the Seekonk Public Library. The audience included people actively homeschooling, people considering home education, as well as people who were just curious about how it is done.

The free presentation included information for families with children of all ages and is suited for residents of any Massachusetts community. Topics included demographics, reasons to homeschool, different learning styles, different methods, teaching what you don't know, finances, socialization, coping with criticism, the unconvinced spouse, finding resources and materials, college, finding support and legality/state guidelines. Informational handouts were distributed and an opportunity for questions followed the presentation.

AHEM representatives are available to present similar programs at other libraries or other gathering spots. For more information email [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info) or call 781-641-0566.

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## Highlighting AHEM County Contacts

While we at Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts love people to make use of the wealth of information about homeschooling in Massachusetts from our website, we also realize that sometimes there is no substitute for a live person to provide information and one-on-one support, to help with questions about the *Charles* guidelines, or to act as a sounding board for concerns in dealing with school officials. This is what AHEM County Contacts are ready to do. AHEM's resources allow County Contacts to have a broad overview and solid understanding of how homeschooling works in Massachusetts as well as an awareness of hot spots and trends.

### County Contacts

- **Barnstable, Dukes, Hampshire, Nantucket & Plymouth Counties**  
Sophia 781-641-0566
- **Berkshire, Middlesex & Suffolk Counties**  
Milva 781-648-5579
- **Bristol, Hampden & Norfolk Counties**  
Suzanne 508-883-3913
- **Essex, Franklin & Worcester Counties**  
Cheryl 978-532-5778

If you prefer email, contact us at [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info). We always welcome your calls, emails, and letters.

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## Become a Friend of AHEM

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (AHEM) is an independent, grassroots, volunteer-run organization working to foster informed and active homeschoolers empowered to be their own best advocates in defending the right to independently homeschool. We welcome and value the participation of all Massachusetts homeschoolers.

Friends of AHEM keep abreast of legislative and other issues that affect Massachusetts homeschoolers via an announcement only email list or this newsletter. Friends of AHEM with email get special notice of AHEM events, field trips, and get-togethers.

Be proactive: become a Friend of AHEM. Even if your involvement is simply to stay informed, that strengthens all of us.

To become a Friend of AHEM and receive email updates, send your name, address, and email address to [info@AHEM.info](mailto:info@AHEM.info). To become a Friend of AHEM and receive *AHEM News* by US mail instead of email updates, send your name and address to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. SASEs are appreciated.

Help AHEM and the environment: Recycle this newsletter by passing it on to a friend!

P.S. This newsletter is mailed to Friends of AHEM without email, to Friends who have voiced a preference for a paper copy over our announcement only emails, and to Friends whose email addresses have been bouncing. We'd appreciate hearing from you with an updated email address in order to conserve paper and postage, and to keep our costs down. Thanks! ~ [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info)

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in Massachusetts  
PO Box 1307  
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