



Student Government Day

Friday, April 5, 2013

AHEM is thrilled to announce that for the first time, home-schoolers will be able to participate in Student Government Day on April 5, 2013 at the State House in Boston! The annual Student Government Day will begin with check-in at 8:30 a.m. and will conclude at 1:00 p.m.

The program is sponsored by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Students must be nominated to participate, and a lottery will be held to determine a participant and an alternate. Details below.

In 1947, the Massachusetts Legislature enacted this program which is traditionally held on a Friday in April. This is an informative program about state government that includes students participating in the role of elected or appointed officials to "observe the processes of government." The program provides educators and students with many opportunities to learn firsthand about state government. It enables government officials to have contact with students. It allows students to voice their positions on important current issues through prepared debates. It enables students to participate in the legislative process through simulated committee hearings and House and Senate formal sessions. It provides the opportunity for students to exchange views with their peers throughout the state on statewide issues.

How does this program work?

Students will be assigned the roles of senators, representatives, constitutional officers and Justices of the Supreme Court.

In March, information will be posted on the Massachusetts Department of Education website indicating the roles that each district's student(s) will play on Student Government Day. The website will also provide information about the bills that will be debated, further details about the day itself, and background information about the state government system.

On Student Government Day, students are able to experience the roles of members of the executive, legislative and judicial branches of state government. Many students will participate as legislators in House and Senate sessions. All students may take part in a simulated committee hearing. Others will visit various elected and appointed office holders and staff as they carry out their daily activities.

Who is eligible to participate?

Homeschooled high school students in their junior or senior year. (As a general guide, a senior (grade 12) may be applying to college this year; a junior may have taken the PSAT in October 2013 and was eligible to enter the competition for scholarships from NMSC (grade 11).

How can a homeschooled student be nominated?

Students may nominate themselves. Download a nomination form in .pdf format here: www.ahem.info/Documents/NominationForm.pdf. Mail the nomination form, consent form, and a copy of your ID to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. **Nominations must be postmarked by January 4, 2013 at the latest.**

A lottery will be held to determine a participant and alternate from each of the eight Governor's Council Districts. The elected student designee and student alternate should both attend. If for some reason the student designee is unable to attend Student Government Day, the student alternate will serve as the district's homeschool student designee to Student Government Day. Please note that whether or not the student alternate takes the role of an absent student designee to Student Government Day, in most cases he or she will also have the opportunity to participate in the day's activities.

Important details that may influence your decision to participate:

- Participants will need to provide their own transportation to the State House on April 5, planning to arrive between 8:30 and 9:00 a.m.
- They will need to wear "appropriate attire" aka for men a sport coat/slacks or a suit, shirt with a collar, tie, and dress shoes. For women a business suit/dress or blouse/shirt and skirt or pants and dress shoes.
- They will need to bring a government-issued ID (school ID, passport, driver's license, or Massachusetts ID)

Student Government Day continued on page 2

Inside this issue . . .

Student Government Day	1
Current State Scene	
Survey Results	2
Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers	
How We Became Unschoolers.....	3
Around AHEM	
Make a Difference.....	4
This May Be Your Last Issue!.....	4

The information in this newsletter does not constitute legal advice; it is provided for informational purposes only. AHEM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible.

Student Government Day *continued from page 1*

www.mass.gov/rmv/license/13bMAID.htm).

- Nominees must read and sign the Consent Form for Student Government Day Activities (www.doe.mass.edu/famcomm/student/sgd_consent.pdf), and submit it to AHEM with the nomination form.
- Parents are welcome to attend Student Government Day. Details will be sent to participants and alternates.
- The National Conference of State Legislatures offers materials to support civics education at www.ncsl.org/public/trust/teachers.htm.

See the answers to frequently asked questions regarding Student Government Day (SGD) here: www.doe.mass.edu/famcomm/student/sgd_faqs.html

Questions? Email info@ahem.info.

Current State Scene . . .

Homeschool Policy & Practice Survey Results

Here are responses to Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts's questionnaire about homeschool policy and practice in Massachusetts.

For over nine years, AHEM has been collecting information from homeschoolers about official town policy (including the policies themselves), and about how homeschooling actually works in towns in Massachusetts, according to homeschoolers. The results draw an interesting picture of the way homeschooling works in general (pretty smoothly) and homeschoolers' personal experiences of dealing with school officials (overall, no major problems).

When do school officials ask that you submit homeschooling plans?

27.2% of schools don't specify. In towns where there is a requested date of submission, there were no reports of problems if a plan was filed later than requested. From the survey:

"I usually send my info in on time, but I have been late occasionally and there were no consequences."

Regarding face-to-face meetings:

64% of respondents report that school officials do not ask for face-to-face meetings. 7.6% report that school officials ask for an initial meeting with homeschoolers when they file their first plan. 6.6% are asked to meet annually with school officials. Of those asked to meet, 52.8% choose to comply, and 47.2% do not. Usually declining a meeting is as simple as saying "No, thank you," or even ignoring the request. Homeschoolers who chose not to meet with school officials were ultimately approved. From the survey:

"I simply declined to address the request when I submitted my plan."

Hours and schedules:

37.8% of respondents are asked to state that they meet or exceed the 900/990 hours required yearly in the public schools. 24% aren't asked for anything. 10.5% are asked for number of hours spent on each subject. 2.3% were asked for a daily grid-type schedule.

When asked to supply a schedule, it often suffices to state instead that you will meet or exceed, or provide the equivalent of, the 900/990 hours of instruction in the public schools, or to ignore the request. In any case, there were no negative consequences for those who chose to decline giving a grid type schedule. From the survey:

"They asked for a weekly schedule and hours by subject- again we ignored this request and quoted Brunelle (the parts you guys have on the AHEM site) and we got approved."

Access to materials:

67.5% of respondents provide a list or partial list of materials and/or resources. 11.6% say a list will be available upon request. 6.6% provide nothing. 1% percent physically show materials to a school official.

Educational background:

35.4% of respondents summarize their educational background. 30.9% say only that they are "of competent ability and good morals." 13.4% provide nothing.

Form of assessment:

- 46.4% of respondents write a progress report. Some people who write progress reports indicate that the schools expect them to also submit work samples (a report combined with work samples is commonly referred to as a "portfolio"). Please note that *Charles* requires homeschoolers to submit only one form of evaluation. A report alone should suffice, or work samples without any written narrative, should suffice. While a portfolio, paper or digital, is nice to have as a record for your own use, there is no need to give that much information to school officials. (See www.ahem.info/Portfolios.htm)
- 12.7% of respondents submit no evaluation at all.
- 13% of respondents submit work samples.
- 8.4% of respondents choose to test. Tests used include the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Personalized Achievement Summary System Test (PASS), the Wide Range Assessment test (WRAT), the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Test.
- Some respondents indicated their evaluation method varies; parents choose from year to year. A few indicated use of a form of evaluation other than testing, progress reports, or work samples.

Frequency of assessment:

68.9% of respondents who indicated frequency submit evaluation once a year, 15.6% don't submit an evaluation, 6.5% submit twice a year, 1% submit three or four times a year. From the survey:

"They ask for quarterly, we provide annual at the same time as we submit education plan. All get sent right before start of school. They send letter saying they accept and ask for quarterly, we ignore and never hear from them. So it has all been going for 10 years now, so it's good."

Approval letters:

62.0% of respondents always receive an approval letter, 10.2% usually receive one, 7.8% sometimes receive one. 3.3% receive one only if they request one. 2.1% never receive one

even if they ask for one. 5% do not receive a letter of approval and have never asked for one.

Do school officials allow homeschoolers to participate in school activities?

8.7% of respondents report that their school does not allow them to participate in school functions at all. Varying percentages of respondents report that their school allows them to participate in either classes (12.6%), sports (20%), extracurricular activities (18.9%), chorus or band (15.7%), borrowing books (7.9%), or some combination of these.

Which best describes your district?

62.7% of respondents reported their town to be “run of the mill,” 32.8% reported their town to be “nice and easy,” 4.1% reported their town to be “a little rocky,” and 0.4% of respondents considered their town to be “a pain in the you-know-what.”

In summary, things continue to go pretty smoothly for homeschoolers here in Massachusetts. Most homeschoolers report no difficulties in dealing with school officials. In cases where school officials ask for more than *Charles* allows, we see over and over again that homeschoolers who are aware of their rights simply submit what *Charles* allows, and they receive approval. Furthermore, standing up for your rights in this way strengthens the ability of other homeschoolers to do the same, and lessens the likelihood that school officials’ demands will escalate.

We can’t say it enough: School policies that exceed *Charles* and *Brunelle* do not have to be adhered to by homeschoolers. (See www.ahem.info/HomeschoolPolicies.html.) From the survey:

I've had no issues with the Superintendent in previous years. For some reason, he sent a letter this summer with a home school application that requested more information than is required in Charles. Said application has been in effect since 2007, but I've never seen it before, even though this is my fourth year interacting with the school district. I ignored the application, and I simply submitted the same information I've submitted each year since I began reporting to him in 2009. My educational plan was accepted as is this year, just as it has been in previous years. I do not provide more than is required in the Charles guidelines."

See *Tips for Writing your Education Plan* www.ahem.info/TipsforWritingYourEdPlan.htm for ways to satisfy the requirements of *Charles* without going into needless detail.

Questions? Call AHM: www.ahem.info/CountyContacts.htm

This is an ongoing project: We hope you will help us build the database further as the more responses we get, the clearer the picture of homeschooling in Massachusetts becomes. The more questionnaire responses we receive, the easier it is for us to pinpoint hotspots or identify trends. Please take a few minutes to fill out the questionnaire, which you can find at www.surveymonkey.com/s/HSGC3N2.

To see the results of the survey summarized in this email so far, visit www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=4dtKhrrnH9AhgZAfH_2bpBuWQ1Km2r_2bOP_2bFg53FJkkPRmA_3d

Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers . . .

How We Became Unschoolers

By Kerry McDonald

When my husband and I first committed to homeschooling when my oldest was just two-years-old, I thought for sure that by the time she was five we would be following an age-appropriate, established curriculum – at least for certain subject areas – and would have time allocated each day for “teaching & learning.” In those early days, when I would talk to the homeschooling moms of older kids at homeschool park days or similar meet-ups, I thought those “unschooly” moms were a little “out there.” They were a bit too radical, I thought, just letting their kids do whatever they wanted, not requiring mastery in certain areas at certain times, not establishing expectations for academic performance. Radical.

And now here I am. Radical and out there. And loving every minute. (OK, almost every minute.)

It wasn’t that I woke up one day and decided to become radical. It wasn’t that I was trying to make a point or hop on a bandwagon. It was that I actually saw my children learning, of their own accord, following their own developing interests, without my tutelage. I watched as their natural, innate childhood curiosity guided them to discover and explore and widen their imaginations. I watched as my oldest learned how to read, not because I sat with her to review letters and sounds and “sight words,” but because she was surrounded by literacy and was ready to read. I watched as she grew increasingly interested in mathematical concepts, not from using a math curriculum or reviewing math problems, but because she was surrounded by numeracy and wanted to know more about how numbers and patterns could be applied. I watched as she became increasingly interested in learning the piano, in practicing and experimenting, not because I told her to practice or because her piano teacher asked her to, but because she was excited about making music. I saw her doing things, learning things, mastering things that I would never have thought to teach her; and that maybe if I had taught her, might not have resulted in so much originality and skill.

I realized, through the fascinating process of watching my children learn, to trust them: to trust a child’s natural drive to know and create, to explore and synthesize. I realized that “unschooling” allows this natural learning to occur in many unanticipated and meaningful ways by allowing our children to show us the way, to reveal to us their passions, their gifts, and to constantly astound us with their capabilities when given the time and space to develop them naturally.

I learned that I am not my children’s teacher. I am their follower. Radical.

Kerry McDonald, M.Ed., lives in Cambridge, Massachusetts with her husband and three young children. She blogs about city homeschooling, natural parenting, and urban homemaking at City Kids Homeschooling. (<http://cityhomeschooling.blogspot.com>)

Around AHEM . . .

Make a Difference

Because of you, homeschoolers can count on AHEM, “a lifeline to homeschoolers.”

- Providing one-to-one assistance to streamline removing a troubled child from school. A parent worried about their bullied child talks with a friendly, knowledgeable person, and realizes there is a workable solution.
- Collecting data, watching trends, and sharing the info. A new superintendent comes to town and filing your education plan isn't as simple as it used to be. Yup, we've seen it happen before, and we're here to tell you it will pass, especially if we stand strong together.
- Helping homeschoolers connect with each other through up-to-date support group listings and events like our Not-Back-to-School Park Day, Salons, field trips, and workshops. How much fun is it to hear a new homeschooler exclaim, “You mean, all of these kids homeschool!?” It's going to be OK. Even better than OK actually.
- Keeping an eye on legislation and maintaining relationships at the State House. Making sure our elected officials know we're here, we're engaged, we're keeping tabs, and we care about our freedoms.
- Supporting homeschoolers through the teen years and beyond. Happy to share info re: college admissions, test taking, financial aid, dual enrollment, work permits. Before you know it they're going to be all grown up.

When you're homeschooling or considering homeschooling, you never know when you might need someone to turn to. And that someone is most likely another homeschooler.

“AHEM understands that homeschooling is not about isolation, but rather about community and engagement.”

Because AHEM is made up of people like you. Because of you, AHEM's website is current with the most up-to-date, quality information and materials free of charge. In 2012, your support made possible workshops for new homeschoolers, brochures on homeschooling delivered to more than 300 libraries in the state, a revision of our popular intro to homeschooling brochure, and discussion salons and workshops so parents could talk about homeschooling face-to-face. In 2013, activities we are planning include visiting the State House with you, a revised unit study on Massachusetts history and government, and a 10th anniversary celebration!

Your donations make all of this, the AHEM website, survey results, free counseling, legislative watch, workshops, and other programs, possible. You can be proud to have made homeschooling in Massachusetts easier. As the year draws to a close, please consider a tax-deductible donation of any amount so we can continue to build grassroots strength for the next decade!

Donate securely online via our website at www.ahem.info/AboutAHEM.html

If you prefer to write a check, please make it out to “Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.” and send it to: AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474.

Many thanks, and wishes for health and prosperity in the new year.

Sincerely,
Milva, Sophia, Stephanie & Cynthia
Directors

SPECIAL NOTICE!

This may be your last issue of AHEM News unless you act now!

Friends of AHEM without Internet access* must complete and return the following form to continue getting AHEM News hard copy. The date of your last issue is above your name on the mailing label. Our goal is to utilize the most efficient and effective option of communicating with our Friends that uses the least amount of resources.

- ☐ I do not have Internet access. Continue to send me AHEM News hard copy.
☐ I would like to donate to AHEM.** I am enclosing a check for:
☐ \$5 ☐ \$10 ☐ \$25 ☐ \$50 ☐ \$100 ☐ \$250 ☐ Other \$_____

Please print neatly:

Name (s): _____

Street Address: _____

City/Town: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Phone: _____

Cut on dotted line and mail to:

AHEM
PO Box 1307
Arlington, MA 02474

*If you *do* have Internet access and want to keep hearing from us, Visit www.ahem.info/AboutAHEM.html to subscribe to our very light volume (about one per week) timely announcement-only email list to be kept apprised of issues and events of interest to Massachusetts homeschoolers. AHEM respects your privacy and will not share your name or contact information with any other organization.

**AHEM, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Donations are tax-deductible.