

AHEM News

Volume 3 • No 1 • Fall 2005

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

What
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when
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Current State Issues . . .

Handling It Ourselves

*by Shay Seaborne of Virginia; adapted for Massachusetts
homeschoolers by Milva McDonald*

New homeschoolers understandably worry about meeting local requirements and interacting with superintendents. Even veterans may feel intimidated by the presumed authority of the school officials with whom they necessarily have contact. This apparently was the case with an experienced homeschooling mom who called me in mid-July, wanting to know whether I had already “asked permission” to homeschool this year. Shocked at hearing that term from a seasoned homeschooler, I uttered the refrain I repeat on discussion lists, via email, over the phone, and in person: “We are not asking permission to homeschool; we are notifying the superintendent that we are homeschooling.”¹

The following day a mom on a statewide discussion list put her finger on the crux of the problem when she

wrote, “The school system did its job on me. I’m afraid to question their authority!” This may be the reason that many homeschooling parents – full-fledged adults – feel intimidated in the face of school officials. Those old feelings return, the same ones that arose when we received the threat of being sent to the principal’s office.

Kafkaesque specters of interrogation and a sense of impending danger may also haunt us. Being aware of this, we can choose to empower ourselves by knowing the law, by providing only legally required materials, and by learning from and joining with other homeschooling parents. Through these measures we can face our fears and respond confidently and appropriately when dealing with school officials who may ask for more than the law requires.

When homeschoolers provide more information than required by law, superintendents can become used to the additional materials, and start asking for them from others, unwittingly creating the perceived need for “legal protection.” It is a vicious cycle. As children we learned to fear school officials’ power, and when we homeschool, they present themselves as the authority. School officials can be intimidating. We become afraid and give them whatever they want, without examining whether the request is in alignment with the law, hoping we’ll be left alone. But doing so simply shows the officials that we are compliant, and they ask for more because we’ve demonstrated that we’ll give them whatever they want. They continue to ask for more, we feel threatened, and we think we are incapable of stopping the cycle without intervention from an organization.

But we homeschooling parents are our own best protection. It isn’t necessary to call in lawyers and conjure visions of lawsuits when a school district requests more than the law requires. Most superintendents are reasonable and are just trying to do their job to the best of their ability. They may simply be unmotivated to learn the complexities and details of our murky home education law, so why uncork the vinegar bottle before you have tried using honey? With a little support and encouragement from each other,

¹ In Massachusetts, we must receive approval prior to the commencement of our homeschooling program. It is important, however, to distinguish between asking permission, and the concept of approval as it exists in Massachusetts law. *Care and Protection of Charles* does not require parents to ask permission to homeschool. Rather, it acknowledges the parental right to homeschool. The requirement to receive approval from local school officials comes directly from the Massachusetts compulsory attendance statute. The court in *Charles* upheld this statute, and laid out guidelines for homeschooling regulation. The court attempted to balance the acknowledged parental right to homeschool with the state interest in the education of its citizenry as expressed in the Massachusetts Constitution. Thus, they put limits on what the school could ask for, and shifted the burden of proof to the school in cases where the school disapproves the home education plan. The school’s limited authority to ask for only what is “essential” to assuring the state interest was not granted so the school could determine whether to allow parents to homeschool or not. It was granted to ensure that all children in the state receive instruction equal in thoroughness and efficiency, and in the progress made therein, of that in the public schools in the same town. When school officials evaluate homeschooling plans, they are required to do it with an eye to that, and only that, and if they deny approval they must prove that the instruction in all the studies is not “equal in thoroughness and efficiency, and in the progress made therein, that in the public schools in the same town.” This process is very different from asking permission.

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AHEM

homeschoolers can effectively respond to superintendents' offices that overstep their bounds.

For example, some superintendents ask for a meeting with the parents, which is beyond what the law requires. Parents can respond with a simple, cordial letter stating that they prefer to conduct the approval process through mail correspondence. If necessary, the parents might also ask where in the law it says such a visit is required. More often than not, and usually very quickly, the school grants the family approval. Other requests Massachusetts superintendents make that parents can gracefully decline to fulfill are a detailed schedule of hours, home visits, use of standardized testing, and use of a purchased curriculum.

In cases where we submit the appropriate paperwork and the school denies approval, we can stand firm, feeling confident that we did what the law requires. If the school chooses to pursue a case against us, they must assume the burden of proof, not us. This is so

uncommon that the only significant court case around homeschooling since *Care and Protection of Charles* was decided in 1987 was *Brunelle*, which clarified a grey area in *Charles* regarding home visits.

When homeschoolers handle the small encounters ourselves we prevent them from snowballing into more serious difficulties. Dealing directly with our local school officials, we avoid falling into depending upon an organization to take care of us. We can retain our individual power and autonomy and demonstrate that homeschoolers are confident, polite, and proactive, rather than fearful and aggressively reactive.

Homeschoolers often contact AHEM with questions about local homeschool policies. We cannot stress enough that policies are not law. Based on our research on local homeschool policies, it is quite common for a written homeschool policy to exceed the law. While seeking to change your local homeschool policy for the better may be a noble effort, it is not necessary to do it just to avoid following objectionable policy points. Anything in a policy that exceeds the law may be ignored. In fact, homeschoolers in Massachusetts regularly ignore bogus policy points and submit only what the law requires with no negative consequences. (<http://www.ahem.info/HSPoliciesinMA.htm>).

Through individual courage and commitment to providing only what the law requires, we protect our homeschooling rights. It is in our best interest to claim that responsibility on an individual level as much as we can, and to encourage others to do the same. Issues such as these are often discussed on state and local homeschool email lists, where members can ask for help and learn the nuances of dealing with education officials (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/MAhomeschoolers/>).

A new homeschooler, filing for her first time, confessed that she is "not fearless, like you are." But I am not fearless. Rather, I vowed, after a bad experience years ago, to avoid taking action based on fear. I am still afraid at times, but I face my fear, utilize the resources available, and trust that everything will turn out all right. And it has.

Interacting with the School District:

- Read your state law and ask questions of knowledgeable people until you understand the law well (<http://www.ahem.info/HSinMAPage.htm>)
- Keep a copy of *Care and Protection of Charles* on hand (<http://www.ahem.info/Charles.htm>)
- Answer superintendents' queries in a timely manner
- Respond politely and confidently

- Communicate with school officials in writing and keep copies of all papers, so you have documentation of all exchanges
- Consider sending mail certified with return receipt as proof of compliance
- Seek information and support from other homeschool parents in a local support group or discussion list, before looking for an organization to act on your behalf
(<http://www.ahem.info/SupportPage.htm>)

Note: Nothing in this article is meant as legal advice. For legal matters, contact a competent attorney.

Shay Seaborne lives in Virginia, where she currently serves as President of VaHomeschoolers. She is also the facilitator of the FOLC eclectic homeschool group, and owner of VaEclecticHomeschool, the state's largest and most active homeschool discussion list. In addition, Shay spearheads the grassroots effort to improve Prince William County, Virginia's homeschool regulation.

Legislative Watch

House Bill 1220

HB 1220, a bill filed by Rep. Paul Loscocco (Republican – Eighth Middlesex), has been assigned to the Education committee. The bill would amend Section 1I of chapter 69 of the general laws. The bill refers to students who are “otherwise instructed.” Since homeschoolers in Massachusetts fall under the category of “otherwise instructed” in the Massachusetts general laws, this bill would affect homeschoolers. While the text of the bill refers to private and parochial students as well as to otherwise instructed students, the description of the bill in the House Docket says, “Home schooling.”

The bill (text below) would:

- require schools to allow homeschoolers and private school students residing in their district to take the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) exam;
- require the state to pay for the administration of the test;
- require schools to award diplomas to homeschoolers who pass MCAS;
- allow schools to offer “remedial” help for homeschoolers who “fail... to meet the requirements of the competency determination;”

On May 5th, 2005 a public hearing to afford citizens, legislators and lobbyists the opportunity to express their views, was held on House Bill 1220.

The researcher at the Education Committee told us a woman and her daughter were the only two people to testify at the public hearing. The bill was also mentioned by a few other people as they spoke in support or

opposition to other bills that day. Researchers are now going through the written testimony that has been submitted and sorting that out to be included in the official record.

There is no executive session scheduled yet for this bill. The executive session is for the committee to review the public testimony and discuss the merits of the bill before making their recommendations to the full membership of the House. The committee then issues its report, recommending that a bill “ought to pass” or “ought not to pass” and the report is submitted to the Clerk’s office. An “executive” session in the legislature is not private. The public may observe, but not participate in, these meetings. (Information on how the legislative process in Massachusetts works is taken from <http://www.mass.gov/legis/lawmkng.htm>.)

If you didn’t express an opinion on this bill but now wish you had, it is not too late to email or call your own representatives and the chairs of the Education committee. See <http://www.ahem.info/HB1220.htm>.

SB 1907- An Act Providing for the Denial of Driver’s Licenses to Truants

This bill, filed by Senator Hart (Democrat – First Suffolk), Senator Brown (Republican – Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex), Rep. Canavan (Democrat – Tenth Plymouth) and Rep. Fallon (Democrat - Thirty-third Middlesex), would require that all applicants for driver’s licenses between the ages of 16 – 18 provide a letter from school officials certifying that the applicant is enrolled in school and is meeting all academic and attendance requirements, or has received a high school diploma or certificate, or GED, . . . or “is enrolled in a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses.”

M.G.L. Chapter 76, mandates that all children between the ages of six and 16 attend school. Once homeschoolers reach the age of 16, reporting and receiving school department approval for home education plans is optional. However, if passed, this bill would put homeschoolers between the ages of 16 – 18 who want to get a driver’s license in an unusual position; these teen homeschoolers would need to provide certification from their school committee that they are “enrolled in a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws...” before being granted a driver’s license or a learner’s permit. Additionally, there are some school departments that will not approve home education plans for homeschoolers who have reached the age of 16. These

homeschoolers would not be able to provide a letter from their school department certifying that they are “enrolled in a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses,” thereby making it impossible for them to receive driver’s licenses. In addition, this bill would introduce the term “home education” into MA legislation; the term “home education” would then have to be defined and picked apart, which could be problematic.

A similar bill, SB 1321, was filed in 2003. At that time, AHM contacted all members of the committee on Public Safety to make our concerns known (see <http://www.ahem.info/SB1321.htm>). That bill died in committee. This new piece of legislation, SB 1907, has been referred to the Joint committee on Transportation. Because of the potential impact on homeschoolers, AHM has contacted the sponsors of this bill to voice our concerns. We will contact committee members should the need arise. We will keep you informed of any activity regarding this bill.

Partial Text of SB 1907

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR THE DENIAL OF DRIVER LICENSES TO TRUANTS

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

SECTION 1.

Chapter 90 of the General Laws, as appearing in the 2000 Official Edition, is hereby amended by inserting after section 8L the following section:-

Section 8M. The application for a license to operate a motor vehicle or for a junior operator’s license or a learner’s permit shall be signed by a parent or guardian, or by another responsible adult, if there is no parent or guardian and such signature shall be notarized. The registrar may issue said license or permit if the applicant provides certification from his school committee that said applicant:

- (1) has received a high school diploma, a high school general educational development (GED) equivalency diploma, a special diploma, or a certificate of high school completion;
- (2) is enrolled in a public or private school and satisfies relevant attendance and academic requirements;
- (3) is enrolled in a study course in preparation for the test of general educational development and satisfies relevant attendance requirements;
- (4) is enrolled in a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses; ...

The bill continues. The full text of the bill can be found at www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/st01/st01907.htm.

Evaluating End-of Year Evaluations

The *Charles* court recognized that certain factors may be considered by the superintendent or school committee in determining whether or not to approve a homeschool proposal. One of these factors is a form of periodic evaluation of the children to ensure educational progress and the attainment of minimum standards. *Charles* says that 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. Home visits may not be required as a condition of approval.

Parents in Massachusetts who prefer testing can choose from a variety of standardized tests. Some are administered by parents (ex: California Achievement Test), some by school officials (ex: CTBS), and some by a third party (ex: Stanford).

Dated work samples mean just that: a few samples of work with dates on them. You do not have to compile an extensive portfolio with narration to submit to the school although you might like to keep such records for your own use.

Narrative progress reports can double as your plan for the coming year if you include information about how current learning will be extended into the coming year, and what new areas will be added. While *Charles* does not specify that a homeschooling plan needs to be submitted annually, many towns expect annual plans. If you live in a town that stipulates your approval is valid for only one year, you might also add pertinent information such as length of homeschool year, qualifications of parents, along with the fact that you plan to submit one such report a year. Links to sample progress reports are available here: <http://www.ahem.info/MethodsofEvaluation.htm>.

It is important to include in your education plan what form of evaluation you plan to use. That way if the school later asks you for a form of evaluation that you’d prefer not to use, you can refer them to your approved education plan in which you stated that you would submit your preferred evaluation, be it test scores, a progress report, or work samples.

Adding a line such as, “An annual progress report/dated work sample/standardized test results (parents pick one) will be submitted upon request” is a good idea if you aren’t sure whether or not they’ll ask for anything; if

they don't ask, you don't need to submit anything. If you know your town consistently requires people to report, then it's somewhat pointless to stipulate "upon request" since you know they'll ask and it just creates more work for them to have to.

Data from the most recent AHEM policy and practice database summary about what form and frequency of assessment Massachusetts homeschoolers provide is interesting:

- About half of respondents wrote a progress report.
- Twenty-one percent of respondents submitted work samples or a portfolio. Several of the people who wrote progress reports indicated that the schools expected them to also submit work samples. Please note that *Charles* (*Charles at 340*) requires homeschoolers to submit only one form of evaluation. A report alone should suffice, or work samples without any written narrative, should suffice.
- Fourteen percent of respondents chose 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.
- Thirteen percent of respondents submit no evaluation at all.
- Ten percent of respondents indicated their evaluation method varies.
- Four percent of respondents indicated use of a form of evaluation other than testing, progress reports, or work samples.

Seventy-seven percent of homeschoolers who indicated frequency submitted evaluation once a year, 19% submitted twice a year, 4% submitted more than twice a year.

Collecting this data is an ongoing project. If you would like to contribute, fill out the questionnaire on page 12 of this newsletter. To read the summary in its entirety, see *AHEM News*, v. 2, n. 2, Winter 2005 or <http://www.ahem.info/Questionnaire.htm>.

Wrap up: Home Education Day at the State House

On the last weekend of April 2005, AHEM organized homeschoolers from around Massachusetts to come together to explore the rich history of the Boston area, connect with legislators, and just plain have fun with each other.

Homeschoolers, many from out of town, warmed up Sunday afternoon with visits to the National Heritage Museum and the Concord Museum. After an afternoon of exploring, many attendees hooked up at the Sunday night Contra Dance where some danced non-stop for three hours to the wonderful calling of Marcie Van Cleave and her accompanying musicians. Marcie runs the Folk Arts Center of New England, and those of you who are now turned onto Contra Dancing can find dances scheduled for all skill levels at their website <http://www.facone.org/>.

On Monday morning, April 25, 2005, about 250 homeschoolers from far and wide descended on the State House. Through the aid of letter writing before the event, many homeschoolers were able to connect one-on-one with their legislators and/or aides, who came to the Great Hall to greet their constituents personally. We mingled while enjoying a light breakfast reception, browsed displays by homeschoolers about their lives, and listened to homeschoolers speak about their lifestyle choice. State House tours or visits with legislators followed.

Photos of the Contra Dance and Monday morning reception can be viewed here: <http://www.ahem.info/Photos.htm>.

We'd like to thank Joyce Spiliotis for sponsoring the Great Hall; Ted Spiliotis for speaking with the State House tour groups; Stop and Shop, Carberry's, and Quebrada for donations of food and drink; and Molly Pinto-Madigan, Peter Bermudes, Giles Holt, and the Altamari family for speaking at the event. Also thanks to the many hands who helped in big ways and small to pull the whole event together. We'd also like to thank everyone who attended. The day would have been a big disappointment without your presence.

"Thank you all for the beautifully organized day at the State House, and what I heard was a wild night of contra dancing..."

National Scene . . .

Privacy Issue

In *AHEM News* v.1 n..3, Spring 2004, we alerted Friends to federal legislation (NCLB) requiring local schools that receive federal funding to provide military recruiters with students' names, addresses, and phone numbers,

(aka “directory information”), or risk losing funding. We provided information on how to protect your privacy by opting out. See details here:
<http://www.ahem.info/MilitaryRecruiters.htm>.

A June 23, 2005 *Washington Post* article
<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/06/22/AR2005062202305.html>
reported on the creation of a database which would collect even more private information about high school students ages 16 to 18 and all college students for the purpose of military recruiting, including full name, date of birth, gender, address, city, state, zip code, and where available Social Security Number (SSN), email address, ethnicity, telephone number, high school name, graduation date, Grade Point Average (GPA) code, education level, college intent (if documented), military interest (if documented), field of study, current college attending, ASVAB Test date, and ASVAB Armed Forces Qualifying Test Category Score. Information would be drawn by using commercial data brokers, state drivers’ license records, and other sources. Particularly disturbing to privacy advocates is that “the plan appeared to be an effort to circumvent laws [The Privacy Act <http://www.usdoj.gov/04foia/privstat.htm>] that restrict the government’s right to collect or hold citizen information by turning to private firms to do the work.”

The Department of Defense defends the effort to collect information for recruiting purposes:
http://www.defenselink.mil/news/Jun2005/20050624_1834.html.

According to the “Leave My Child Alone” website, the Department of Defense has agreed to get the Opt Out information up on their site, but to date it has not appeared there. If you are concerned about protecting your child’s privacy, you can find information on how to suppress your child’s information in this database here:
<http://www.leavemychildalone.org/>.

Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers . . .

A Homeschooling Fable

Inspired by the article “Handling It Ourselves,” Suzanne MacDonald was moved to write about her own experience of facing school officials:

I consider myself a somewhat seasoned homeschooler as my kids have never been to school, my oldest being 14. Yet, it took me four years after we moved to Bellingham to get the courage up to go to my

superintendent’s office to hand deliver my proposals along with my end of the year evaluations and plan for the following year (I just give it to them all at once and then I’m done with it for a year) for the purpose of asking for a letter of acceptance so that I can take advantage of the homeschooling discounts at various bookstores.

The letter they send *does not* actually say anything about accepting my homeschool plan. I receive the same formatted letter each year stating something like, “upon receipt of standardized test scores and quarterly reports, we are prepared to approve your plan...” Each year I send my reply educating them about the legal homeschooling requirements based on the *Charles* decision, and that is the end of it. I never hear back from them *but* I don’t have proof that I am a homeschooler with an approved plan, which is what our *Barnes & Noble* in Bellingham requires to get an educator’s discount card.

So last year I went into the superintendent’s office, hand delivered my homeschool materials, asked for a letter of acceptance, and stated my reason for wanting it. I went on to inform them that I receive a letter each year but it doesn’t actually say it approves my plan. Not only did the secretary *never* even look at my proposal, she did not hesitate and right then and there rewrote the letter, with a little help from me standing there, that was still in her computer file and handed it to me. Out the door I went saying to myself, “Whew that wasn’t nearly as bad as I thought it would be. Another year done!” I intend to do the same thing this year.

I left the office realizing that I think it is a situation where more often than not they just don’t know the legal requirements, and they have so much on their plates, rather than focus much effort on homeschoolers, they do what they think they are supposed to do or what they’ve seen other towns do, thinking that is law. That’s where things become misinterpreted and bogus!

Moral of the story: Face your fears! It’s not as bad or intimidating as you might think. And very likely you will discover that school officials only do what they think they are supposed to do most often out of ignorance.

Around AHEM . . .

Faces at AHEM

Roberta Altamari lives in Watertown with her husband and two children, ages three and almost nine. She has been educating both daughters at home since birth and

LOVES it! Not only does she enjoy sharing all sorts of interesting adventures, but she appreciates having the time to explore and learn with her girls. Roberta strongly believes in being an active member of her community and is always searching for like-minded families with whom to do cooperative activities. She works part time as the Director of Religious Education at the Unitarian Universalist church in Watertown and is a monthly columnist for her local paper. In her very limited free time, she enjoys chatting with friends, doing anything artistic, reading good books, and learning how to play her guitar. Roberta declares that her recent work with AHEM to help with the Home Education Day at the State House was very inspiring for her and well worth her efforts. She feels that the work of AHEM is very important and she was extremely grateful to get to work directly with AHEM's amazing and talented leaders. [Thanks Roberta! – ed.]

AHEM Trip to Wellfleet Audubon Sanctuary

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts is planning two programs for ages six and up on **Friday, September 9th, 2005** at the **Wellfleet Audubon Sanctuary** on Cape Cod, 291 State Highway, Route 6, Wellfleet.

The Wellfleet Bay Wildlife Sanctuary is a spectacular 1,100-acre sanctuary on Cape Cod Bay, featuring five miles of trails through pinewoods, salt marsh, and heath land, including freshwater pond, tidal creek, and sandy beach habitats. Trained Teacher/Naturalists specialize in providing hands-on, interactive learning experiences that encourage investigation of the natural world. Programs explore the varied habitats of Wellfleet Bay and help enrich the understanding of human interrelationships with the environment. They are designed to invite participation and active inquiry and to develop environmental literacy.

Make a day of it by packing a lunch and then spending the afternoon exploring in the company of other Massachusetts homeschoolers some of the five miles of scenic trails, the Nature Center's green architecture, and a beautiful butterfly and hummingbird garden.

Choose one of the following two programs:
Tidal Flats and Salt Marsh Walk, 9:15 – 11:15 AM
(MEET AT 9:00 AM in Nature Center)

Explore the tidal flats looking for snails, crabs, horseshoe crabs, shorebirds, and other marine creatures. A naturalist will lead group activities, such as a scavenger hunt, and assist with species identification. Use dip nets

and fish traps to discover fiddler crabs, shrimp, eels, and other marine organisms that inhabit the salt marsh. A naturalist will demonstrate proper sampling techniques and provide interpretation of the habitat. **Cost:** \$7.50/person for the program.

Field Study: Box Turtle Tracking, 9:30 – 11:00 am
(MEET at 9:15 AM in Nature Center)

Students participate in on-going research on the Eastern box turtle, a state species of special concern. Learn about its natural history, use radio telemetry equipment, and discuss the benefits of research. **Cost:** \$6.00/person for the program.

If you want to visit the sanctuary but not take part in one of the programs: Parents can explore the sanctuary with little ones while older children (ages 6 and up) and adults are tracking turtles or on the guided walk. If parents choose to do this, they must pay \$5 per ages 13+ and \$3 for children ages 3-12 and note when registering that they will not be included in the head count for either group. Children under 3 are free. Mass Audubon members can walk for free at any time, but will need to pay the \$7.50 program fee if they wish to participate in the guided walk or the \$6.00 program fee if they wish to participate in the turtle tracking. MAS membership includes anyone in the household under the age of 18.

If you want to go: Mail a check made out to *Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts* to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Please include:

- the number of children and adults,
- ages of children,
- which program, or no program
- your address, and
- email or phone number.

Those with email will receive confirmation about a week before the visit.

Space is limited; **checks must be postmarked by August 15th**. No refunds after August 15th. Email FieldTrips@AHEM.info for more information or call 781-641-0566.

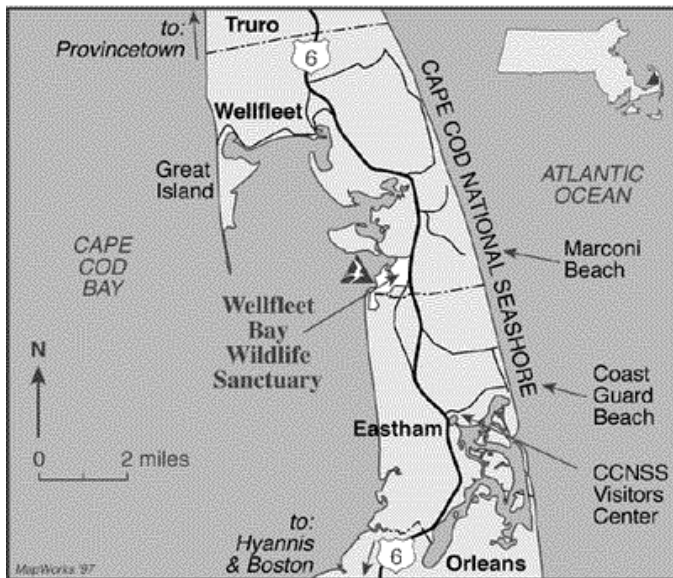
Directions:

From Boston: Follow Rt. 3 south and cross the Sagamore Bridge to Cape Cod. Follow Rt. 6 east for 45 miles. The sanctuary entrance is on the left just over the Wellfleet/Eastham town line after the Wellfleet Drive-in Theater.

From Providence: Follow Rt. I-195 or Rt. I-495 to Rt. 25 and cross the Bourne Bridge to Cape Cod. Turn off the Bourne Rotary at the exit for Rt. 6 east. Continue on Rt. 6 for 50 miles. The sanctuary entrance is on the left just

over the Wellfleet/ Eastham town line after the Wellfleet Drive-in Theater.

From Provincetown: Take Rt. 6 west to South Wellfleet. The sanctuary entrance is on the right just before the Wellfleet Drive-in Theater.



Field trip participants will be added to the Friends of AHM list unless they specifically opt out.

AHM Trip to Hancock Shaker Village

Advocates for Home Education in MA is planning a field trip to the Hancock Shaker Village in Pittsfield, MA on Monday, September 26th at 10:30 AM. **The deadline for registration is Monday, September 12th, 2005.**

The Shakers called this community "The City of Peace." Although you will find Hancock Shaker Village a welcome retreat from today's hectic pace, this name belies the level of activity at this living museum.

Set your watch back a century or two and see the Village come to life through vibrant programs, tours, exhibitions and hands-on activities. Talk with artisans on a tour focused on Shaker daily life. Learn about the heritage breeds of animals that roam the pastures and the heirloom crops in the gardens. Learn to sing "Simple Gifts." Your children can even take a lesson with a Shaker schoolteacher (costumed staff). Or just soak up the beauty of Shaker architecture.

This beautifully restored village, set on 1,200 acres of farm, woodland and pasture, is home to the premier collection of Shaker buildings and artifacts. Graceful Shaker furniture, craft and household items – oval boxes, brooms, baskets and textiles – are exhibited in 20 historic buildings, each an architectural gem. The Round Stone Barn, perhaps the most famous of all Shaker

buildings, is a testament to Shaker innovation and design.

All of the historic buildings are open and you may walk through the Village at your own pace, choosing from a variety of talks, brief thematic tours, craft demonstrations, and activities. The Discovery Room is also open, with hands-on activities for children. The Florence Gould Café is open daily, serving continental breakfast, lunch and take-out picnics.

Our group admission rate to the Village is \$3/per child, \$12/ per adult. Some of us will be arriving in Great Barrington on Sunday afternoon, September 25th, and will be staying at the Holiday Inn overnight. The hotel has an indoor pool. You can make reservations at <http://www.berkshirehotelsgroup.com/holidayinnexpress.html> or call 413-528-1810. Please let them know you are with the AHM group as they will try to keep our rooms close together.

If you want to go: Mail a check for the total made out to "Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts" to AHM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Please include:

- the number and names of children and adults,
- ages of children,
- your address, and
- email or phone number.

Those with email will receive confirmation of payment.

Space is limited; checks must be postmarked by September 12th. No refunds after September 12th. Email FieldTrips@AHM.info for more information or call 978-532-5778.

Directions:

From Boston (approximately 2 1/2 hours), Springfield (approximately 1 hour), Massachusetts and other points east:

- Take I-90 (Massachusetts Turnpike) west to exit 1
- Take Route 41 north through the towns of West Stockbridge and Richmond to the junction of Route 20
- Take Route 20 west for 0.5 miles; the Village's entrance is on the left

Field trip participants will be added to the Friends of AHM list unless they specifically opt out.

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, November 17th, at 1:00 PM. Children are welcome. Our tour will begin promptly at 1:00 PM, so please plan to meet in Doric Hall (2nd floor) at 12:30 PM. If there is a legislative session going on that day, we will be able to sit in for part of the session.

Participants are encouraged to contact your own senator or representative and let them know you will be visiting the State House on November 17th. 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 for contact info for your representative.

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

Charitable status approved

In other news, we are pleased to announce that Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc., has been determined by the IRS to be a charitable 501(c)(3) organization. This means that all donations to AHEM since November 8, 2004, plus all future donations, are tax deductible!

Why donate to us?

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. (AHEM) is a nonprofit, independent, grassroots, volunteer-run, educational organization that gathers and disseminates information about homeschooling in Massachusetts through education, advocacy, and events. We understand that you work hard for your money and that you cannot give to every organization that you come across. Please consider:

- **Your donation keeps this organization up and running.** Like every other nonprofit organization, we have costs which include maintaining our website, our PO box, photocopying, postage, etc.
- **Your donation goes farther.** We understand that you want as much of your donation as possible to go towards the mission of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. For example, all of our workers are volunteers who donate their time and energy and do so without compensation. When we do spend money, we do our best to make sure that we have found the most efficient and effective option that uses the least amount of resources.

How to Donate

Please make out your checks to "Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc." and send them to the following address:

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.
PO Box 1307
Arlington, MA 02474

Thank you for helping to maintain an active and informed population of homeschoolers in Massachusetts, committed to maintaining our right to independently homeschool!

All donations to AHEM are tax deductible!

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An invitation to browse

AHEM's website still has all the great information it's had from the beginning, but recent additions and changes, some suggested by site users, have made it even more informative, and, we hope, easier to navigate. We hope you'll take a moment to browse one or more revamped or new sections that might be of interest to you:

- **Making the Decision and Getting Started**
Homeschooling: An ocean of information awaits you; this page serves as a compass, helping you navigate and chart your course, directing you to the basics of information and support for homeschooling in Massachusetts.
<http://www.ahem.info/GettingStarted.htm>
- **Recommended books:** Including recommended reading about homeschooling and related subjects, works of fiction that feature homeschooling, and writing by homeschoolers. Please tell us about books that you think should be included. Every Amazon.com purchase that starts on the AHEM website helps support AHEM.
<http://www.ahem.info/Books.htm>

- **Beyond Homeschooling:** Addressing a variety of topics:
 - How Do We Know When We're Done?
 - Alternatives to College
 - What About College? with links to info on how to apply, scholarships, and financial aid
 - Grown up homeschoolers<http://www.ahem.info/BeyondHomeschooling.htm>
- **Libraries and Homeschoolers:** Our hope is that this section of our website, designed specifically with Massachusetts librarians in mind, will help librarians to better serve their patrons who are researching the basics of information about and support for homeschooling in Massachusetts, as well as illustrate some ways to enhance the valuable homeschooler-library relationship.
 <http://www.ahem.info/LibrariesandHomeschoolers.htm>

We are always interested to hear your suggestions for additions and improvements to the website. Email info@ahem.info.

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. We always welcome your calls, emails, and letters.

Virtual Volunteering for AHEM

From day one, AHEM has intended to make it transparent to Massachusetts homeschoolers how they can get involved and empowered as part of a network of Massachusetts homeschoolers committed to maintaining the rights of individual families to homeschool today and in the future.

The simplest step to that end is to become a Friend of AHEM, which means you are staying informed of issues that affect Massachusetts homeschoolers, and that strengthens all of us. See page 11 for details.

We are in the process of developing a virtual volunteer program and refining our virtual volunteer opportunities. Here are some sample jobs an online volunteer might do:

- Proofing the web site
- Organizing a field trip
- Creating a mailing labels database
- Fundraising
- Tracking legislation
- Writing newsletter articles

Most of our virtual volunteer opportunities take only a few hours to complete. All can be done from the comfort of your own home. Some are opportunities for kids or teens, as well as adults, to help out a cause that is important to them.

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. (AHEM) is a nonprofit, independent, grassroots, volunteer-run, educational organization that gathers and disseminates information about homeschooling in Massachusetts through education, advocacy, and events. We welcome and value the participation of anyone interested in homeschooling in Massachusetts.

We rely on volunteers, both onsite and online, to make it all happen. Please take a look at our web site, <http://www.ahem.info/VirtualVolunteers.htm>, to find out more. We hope you will consider AHEM a worthy cause to which to contribute some of your valuable time, and we look forward to getting to know some of you better through working together to support homeschooling in Massachusetts.

AHEM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. Financial contributions to support our work are always greatly appreciated as well. Checks should be made out to AHEM and mailed to PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. All donations are fully tax deductible.

Thank you for helping to foster an active and informed population of homeschoolers in Massachusetts,

committed to maintaining our right to independently homeschool, whether you do so by reading our emails or newsletter, opening your checkbook, or offering your time to help us out on one or more projects!

Thank You Volunteers!

- **Suzanne MacDonald** for her work in creating a library mailing list.

Not-Back-to-School Season

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 <http://www.ahem.info/Not-Back-to-SchoolEvents.htm>.

It is 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. You are welcome to attend any or all of the events listed on this page. These events are a great way to taste the flavor of different local support groups. All of them take place in public areas, so if you're new, introduce yourself around so others will know you're there for the event.

- 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 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.

Become a Friend of AHEM

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (AHEM) is a nonprofit, independent, grassroots, volunteer-run, educational organization that gathers and disseminates information about homeschooling in Massachusetts through education, advocacy, and events. We believe that informed and active homeschoolers are their own best advocates in maintaining the right to independently homeschool. We welcome and value the participation of anyone interested in homeschooling in Massachusetts.

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. 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.

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All donations are tax deductible.

To become a Friend of AHEM, send your name and address to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474, or email info@AHEM.info. It's free!

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WELCOME TO AHEM! With your help, homeschoolers in Massachusetts are empowering themselves to keep Massachusetts a homeschool friendly environment by sharing information and support in dealing with school officials.

You can become proactive right away by filling out this form and returning it to:

AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474-0021 or email to info@AHEM.info.

PLEASE PRINT NEATLY

Your name: _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ Zip Code: _____

Phone: _____ Email: _____

Would you like to be added to the Friends of AHEM email list for periodic updates on the state of homeschooling in MA, including emergency info if warranted? (circle one) Yes No

AHEM respects your privacy and will not share your name or contact information with any other organization.

Check anything you'd like to find out more about:

- ☐ Virtual Volunteering
- ☐ Helping with conferences, workshops, or other events
- ☐ Getting AHEM brochures on how to get started homeschooling in MA to distribute at meetings, in libraries, etc.

Please provide the following information about policy and procedure to be added to our town-by-town database of homeschooling policies in Massachusetts. Use the back if you need to, and please attach any supporting documentation.

Date: _____ Town/District: _____ County: _____

Superintendent or entity in charge of local homeschool policy: _____

How much in advance of the school year do school officials ask that you submit homeschooling plans? What do you do? Please explain.

Do school officials ask to meet with homeschoolers? Do you comply? Please explain.

Do school officials ask to visit your home? Do you comply? Please explain.

Do school officials ask for a schedule or number of hours on each subject? Do you comply? Please explain.

Form of assessment: (circle whatever you provide)

Progress report	Work samples	Portfolio	Standardized testing	Other (please specify)
How many times a year?			If a test, which one?	

Do school officials provide you with a letter of approval?

Do school officials allow homeschoolers to participate in school activities? Please be specific.

Does your town have a written homeschooling policy? Have homeschoolers in your town worked with school officials to create a homeschooling policy? Please elaborate.

On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy to deal with and 5 being very difficult, how would you rate your town's treatment of homeschoolers? (Circle one)

1 very easy **2** easy **3** average **4** difficult **5** very difficult

Any other information you feel would be useful for other homeschoolers to know about how your town puts homeschooling policy into practice? Please use the back if necessary and **please attach any written policies you've received from your school district.** Thanks for taking the time to help other Massachusetts homeschoolers!

Return questionnaire to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474-0021

www.AHEM.info