



AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

**What
you
need
to
know
when
you
need
to
know
it**

Still Here After All These Years

Dear Friend of AHEM,

At AHEM we know that in an ever-changing world, some things remain the same. The resources that help support homeschooling families like you still come primarily from committed, knowledgeable homeschooling parents like our AHEM volunteers.

You can help AHEM continue to provide the reliable quality service you've come to expect. **AHEM depends on donations from homeschoolers like you to keep bringing you our website, survey results, free counseling, legislative watch, and programming.** As the year draws to a close, please consider a tax-deductible donation of any amount so we can continue to work for you!

- **AHEM.info: the go-to source for homeschooling in Massachusetts** Whether it's getting started, understanding state law, or finding a support group, our comprehensive website is there for you. Our sample education plan and progress reports help streamline the approval process, allowing you to spend more time on homeschooling and less on paperwork. Our e-mail updates provide information about events, legislative issues, and thought-provoking essays about the homeschooling lifestyle.
- **Maintaining homeschooling freedoms** Helping ensure the continuity of our right to homeschool is part of AHEM's core mission. We fulfill it by maintaining a policy and practice database that helps us identify trends and answer questions with evidence-based responses. Through our legislative watch, we monitor bills and inform you when one pertinent to homeschooling in Massachusetts arises. Our periodic State House visits deliver information about homeschooling to legislators and connect them with their homeschooling constituents.
- **County Contacts** AHEM recognizes that sometimes you need more than a screen full of information, and acknowledges the value of personal, one-to-one communication and support. That's why county contacts are available every day to talk with you and address your questions and concerns.
- **Face-to-face support** Because all the technology in the world can't replace the value of human connection, AHEM provides programs offering face-to-face support. *Getting Started Homeschooling* and *Homeschool High School to College* workshops are run by experienced homeschoolers who share their wisdom. *AHEM Salons* feature lively discussion with your homeschooling peers about relevant topics. *Field trips* give you a chance to enjoy theater, museums, and more while meeting other homeschooling families.

Please make your check 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 McDonald, Sophia Sayigh &
Stephanie Griego, Directors
Advocates for Home Education in MA, Inc.

Current State Scene . . .

Legislative Update

AHEM continues to monitor all bills filed during the current 187th Massachusetts Legislative session (2011-2012) that have the potential to impact homeschoolers in our state. The following education bills were filed within the first few months of the session and are now being considered by the Joint committee on Education:

H 1909, *Rep. Antonio Cabral, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep. Stephen R. Canessa, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep. Kay Khan, Democrat, Newton*; **AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT FULL DAY KINDERGARTEN**

This bill would amend MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by directing the Board of Education to "establish the permissible and mandatory ages for school attendance provided that each child be required to attend a full-day educational program at kindergarten age."

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This bill would effectively lower the required school attendance age by making kindergarten mandatory. Homeschoolers in MA would presumably need to begin filing education plans for their “kindergarten aged” children. This bill was referred to the Joint committee on Education on 2/25/11. A hearing was held on May 23, 2011. No further action has been taken.

H 1081, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, AN ACT RELATIVE TO DETERMINING THE MANDATORY MINIMUM AGE FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

This bill appears to go hand in hand with H 1909. It also amends MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by further directing the Board of Education to “promulgate regulations setting a uniform calendar date each year for the purpose of determining the mandatory minimum age for school attendance . . .” The bill was referred to the Joint committee on Education on 2/16/11. A hearing was held on May 23, 2011. No further action has been taken.

H 1964, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, and others; AN ACT RELATIVE TO DROPOUT PREVENTION

H 1964 also amends MGL Ch. 69 Sec. 1B by changing the mandatory high school attendance age from 16 to 18. It further amends MGL Ch. 76 with the “age 18” requirement and directs the school Superintendent to notify the Registry of Motor Vehicles (“RMV”) if a person between the ages of 16 and 18 withdraws from school. The RMV may then revoke that person’s driver’s license, except in certain extenuating circumstances. This bill was referred to the Joint committee on Education on 2/25/11. On September 27, 2011 the Joint committee held a hearing on the bill but no further action has yet been reported.

H 3674, Rep. Marcus A. Devers, Democrat, Lawrence, AN ACT ESTABLISHING THE MAXIMUM AGE FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE IN THE CITY OF LAWRENCE

This bill would allow the City of Lawrence, MA to establish its own maximum age for school attendance, “which shall be 18 years of age, or upon the completion of a high school diploma,” notwithstanding the mandatory maximum age otherwise established by the state board of education. This bill was referred to the Joint committee on Education on 9/1/11. No further action has been taken.

In November, it was reported that, “A state board that oversees public education has approved a state takeover of the troubled Lawrence school system, citing chronic declines in student performance, a low graduation rate and ‘ineffective leadership.’” [http://articles.boston.com/2011-11-29/news/30455384_1_graduation-rate-state-takeover-board-meeting]

S 1743, Rep. John A. Hart, Democrat, Boston AN ACT TO PROVIDE FOR THE DENIAL OF DRIVER’S LICENSES FOR TRUANTS

This bill amends MGL Ch. 90 by adding a section requiring that an application for a driver’s license or learner’s permit be signed by a parent or guardian and be accompanied by certification from the school district that the applicant is enrolled in high school or, among other possibilities, “a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws govern-

ing such courses . . .” This bill would seem to require homeschoolers to present an approval letter or other certification from the school district that they are engaged in an approved homeschooling plan prior to obtaining a driver’s license. The bill was referred to the Joint committee on Transportation on 1/24/11. No further action has been taken.

We will continue to follow these bills, as well as numerous others that are likely to be filed during this legislative session, and keep our Friends informed about additional proposed legislation that could affect MA homeschoolers. The calendar for the Joint committee on Education indicates that no hearings are currently scheduled on any education bills between now and March 2012.

Around AHM . . .

Homeschooling High School to College

Join the Robbins Library for Homeschooling High School to College, Wednesday, January 4, 7:00 pm - 9:00 pm. This presentation is intended for those currently homeschooling, as well as parents and teens interested in homeschooling high school. Topics to be covered include examples of what homeschooling high school can look like when you operate without an outside curriculum and keep your own records; why it can be a smart choice; resources and support; a timeline for homeschooling high school with college in mind, including figuring out where to apply, keeping records, grades, testing, preparing a portfolio, resumé and transcript. Handouts will be available and an opportunity for questions will follow the presentation. Presented by Sophia Sayigh, a founder and director of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc., a non-profit 501(c)(3) charitable educational organization that gathers and disseminates information about homeschooling in Massachusetts through education, advocacy, and events. Register at www.robbslibrary.org.

AHM Salons Are Back!

Come partake in lively, stimulating discussion with fellow homeschooling parents and teens in a relaxed, friendly environment. Each gathering will feature a different topic.

On January 18, the topic will be “**Avoiding Homeschool Burnout.**” The house is a mess, the kids are eating cereal for dinner, you’re burning through two tanks of gas a week, and you can’t find a free day to fit in a field trip. Sound familiar? The abundance of resources available to homeschoolers can be both a blessing and a curse. Where and how do you draw the line? Join us for a lively discussion about how to avoid overscheduling, stress reduction and coping strategies for busy lives, the importance of setting priorities, the value of free time, as well as examining expectations for ourselves and our kids.

The next topic will be “Rebel, Rebel: Being a Free Thinker in a Culture of Conformity” in March.

The first meeting will take place on Wednesday, January 18 at

7:30 PM in the Community Room at Whole Foods, 340 River St., Cambridge, MA. If you want, you can purchase soups, salads, sandwiches, hot and cold entrees, baked goods, and drinks at Whole Foods. Please do not bring outside food in.

The discussion will be geared toward adults, so we ask that you leave at home children who will be as happy or happier there with a loving caregiver. Interested teens are welcome to attend.

Cost is \$10/person (teen and adult) to reserve your spot; the full price will be refunded to you at the meeting, making your participation FREE. If you don't show up, your money will be donated to support the non-profit mission of AHEM.

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:

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

Space is limited and spots are allotted in the order checks are received; **checks must be postmarked by January 6th**. No refunds after January 6th except those made to attendees at the meeting on January 18th. Those with email will receive confirmation about a week before the meeting.

IMPORTANT: If you sign up for this event, please do your best to attend. Remember:

- When you sign up, you are reserving a spot that then cannot be given to someone else.
- If you sign up and do not show up, AHEM reserves the right to no longer treat your reservation request on a first come, first served basis for future AHEM events, only assigning you a spot should there be room after the deadline has been met.

Email FieldTrips@AHEM.info for more information or call 781-648-5579.

Directions: Minutes from the Mass Pike and Storrow Drive (take the Cambridge exit), and seconds from Memorial Drive. Take River Street off Mem. Drive (signs say "To Central Square"). Whole Foods is one block up on the right. See http://wholefoodsmarket.com/stores/store-locations/?storeabbr=RVR#map_top.

Parking: Free and ample parking!

Salon Series participants will be added to the Friends of AHEM list unless they specifically opt out.

Policy and Practice Database Results

For over eight 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? 28.3% 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.

Regarding face-to-face meetings: 65.4% of respondents report that school officials do not ask for face-to-face meetings. 7.8% report that school officials ask for an initial meeting with homeschoolers when they filed their first plan. 7.1% are asked to meet annually with school officials. Of those asked to meet, 54.2% choose to comply, and 45.8% 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.

Hours and schedules: 38.5% of respondents are asked to state that they meet or exceed the 900/990 hours required yearly in the public schools. 24.6% aren't asked for anything. 9.8% are asked for number of hours spent on each subject. 2.1% 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.

Access to materials: 68.4% of respondents provide a list or partial list of materials and/or resources. 11.8% say a list will be available upon request. 6.2% provide nothing. 1.1% percent physically show materials to a school official.

Educational background: 34.8% of respondents summarize their educational background. 31.2% say only that they are "of competent ability and good morals." 13.2% provide nothing.

Form of assessment:

- 44.7% 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.
- 14.1% of respondents submit no evaluation at all.
- 11.9% of respondents submit work samples.
- 9.3% of respondents choose to 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: 68.3% of respondents who indicated frequency submit evaluation once a year, 15.4% don't submit an evaluation, 7.7% submit twice a year, 0.7% submit three or four times a year.

Approval letters: 62.0% of respondents always receive an approval letter, 10.3% usually receive one, 8.7% sometimes receive one. 3.4% receive one only if they request one. 2.7% never receive one even if they ask for one. 4.9% do not receive

a letter of approval and have never asked for one.

Do school officials allow homeschoolers to participate in school activities? 9.1% 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 (13.6%), sports (20.9%), extracurricular activities (19.1%), chorus or band (17.5%), borrowing books (9.1%), or some combination of these.

Which best describes your district? 62.0% of respondents reported their town to be "run of the mill," 33.4% reported their town to be "nice and easy," 4.5% reported their town to be "a little rocky," and 0.2% of respondents considered their town to be "a pain in the you-know-what." Some cities and towns that homeschoolers rate "nice and easy" in good percentages include Boston, Medford, Medway, and Sharon.

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 there are no negative repercussions for standing up for oneself in this way. 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 *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 AHEM. <http://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 <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/HSGC3N2>.

To see the results of the survey summarized here so far, visit http://www.surveymonkey.com/sr.aspx?sm=4dtKhrrnH9AhgZAFH_2bpBuWQ1Km2r_2bOP_2bFg53FJkkPRmA_3d

Become a Friend of AHEM

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. Donations to offset cost are appreciated.



www.facebook.com/AHEM.ma

SPECIAL NOTICE!

This will 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 after this issue. 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, email your name and address to info@AHem.info with "Subscribe by email" in the subject line. We will gladly add you 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.