



AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

Volume 11 • No 1 • Fall 2013

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

AHEM Whole Education Without Schooling Conference

Saturday, October 5, 2013

Arlington Center for the Arts Theater
41 Foster St., Arlington, MA

Join us for a dynamic and provocative day of ideas and discussion as we celebrate TEN years of AHEM!

Help AHEM celebrate our tenth anniversary at the Whole Education Without Schooling Conference on October 5 in Arlington, MA. The keynote will be delivered by AHEM founder Sophia Sayigh, who will share wisdom, perspective, and inspiration gleaned from her many years of homeschooling experience. A panel discussion featuring parents and homeschooled young adults will cover common concerns and issues, and offer opportunities to ask questions. There'll be plenty of time for networking and socializing with other Massachusetts homeschoolers, too.

Schedule

- 12:30 – 1:00: Registration
- 1:00 – 1:45: Welcome & Keynote by Sophia Sayigh, Co-Founder and Director of AHEM
- 1:45 – 3:15: Panel of parents and homeschooled young adults
- 3:15 – 4:00: Break: Time for refreshments, ice breakers, networking, Silent Auction
- 4:00 – 4:45: Discussion with the AHEM Board – attendees set the agenda

Food: We will provide light refreshments. Feel free to bring your own non-messy food and drink.

Children: Because we are unable to make special accommodations for children, we ask that you leave at home children who will be as happy or happier there with a loving caregiver. Children over 12 months old who accompany you will need to register, pay the registration fee, and be supervised by you at all times.

Early Registration Discount!

There are two options for registering:

- You can register online at <http://ahemnewsconference.eventbrite.com>. Eventbrite accepts credit cards, but charges a fee of 2.5% + 99¢ per ticket.
- Download a registration form in pdf format here: <http://www.ahem.info/Documents/WEWSRegistrationForm2013.pdf>. Must be postmarked no later than August 9 to pay just \$18.00 per person. After August 9, pay \$25 per person.

Current State Scene . . .

Legislative Update

AHEM continues to monitor bills pending in the 188th Legislative Session for any action taken on education bills that may impact Massachusetts homeschoolers. The current session, which began in January 2013, runs for

two years. Because the session is still in its early stages, we will not likely see further action taken on pending bills until late fall 2013 into spring 2014. Below is a summary of the current status of the education bills AHEM is tracking:

KINDERGARTEN REQUIREMENTS

H 349 – Rep. Antonio Cabral, D., New Bedford; AN ACT TO IMPLEMENT FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN This bill would amend Chapters 69 and 76 of the General Laws by requiring every child to be enrolled in a full-day Kindergarten program. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 6/20/13 but no further action has been taken.

H 3339 – Rep. Brian Ashe, D., Longmeadow, AN ACT RELATIVE TO CHANGING THE MINIMUM AGE REQUIREMENT FOR KINDERGARTEN This bill would make the mandatory minimum age for attendance of kindergarten 5 years of age. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 6/20/13 but no further action has been taken.

BILLS RAISING THE MANDATORY ATTENDANCE AGE

H 524 – Rep. Martha M. Walz, D. Boston; AN ACT RAISING THE SCHOOL DROPOUT AGE This bill would amend Chapter 69 of the General Laws and require an increase in school

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attendance age from sixteen to eighteen. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Aud.

S 208 – State Senator Sonia Chang-Diaz, D. Boston, Senate Chair of Joint Committee on Education; **AN ACT RELATIVE TO DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY** This bill is essentially the Senate version of H 524. It would amend both Chapters 69 and 76 with the “age 18” attendance requirement and further establish tracking and coaching programs to identify and help students at risk of dropping out of high school. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 350 – Rep. Antonio Cabral, D. New Bedford; **AN ACT TO REQUIRE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE UP TO AGE EIGHTEEN OR UNTIL GRADUATION** This bill would require school attendance between the ages of six and eighteen, “having completed at least the 12th grade or whichever comes first.” It was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 338 – Rep. Garrett J. Bradley, D. Hingham; **AN ACT RAISING THE COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE TO 18** This bill would require all children under the age of 18 to attend school if they have not graduated. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 462 – Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch, D. Wellesley, House Chair of Joint Committee on Education; **AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE MAXIMUM PERMISSIBLE AGE FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** This bill directs the Board of Education to “develop regulations to establish the maximum permissible age for school attendance, provided that such regulations shall address the types of alternative education programs or settings that are suitable for individuals who exceed the maximum permissible age of attendance who do not have a high school diploma or the equivalent.” The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 376 – Reps. Carlos Henriquez, D. Dorchester, Edward F. Coppinger, D. Boston; **AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE COMPULSORY AGE OF SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** This bill seeks to increase the compulsory age of school attendance in the city of Boston to 18, or upon successful completion of all coursework required to graduate. The city of Boston has already provided local approval. H376 was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 368 – Rep. Marcos A. Devers, Democrat, Lawrence, Barry R. Finegold, and Frank A. Moran; **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.” The City of Lawrence has already approved the bill. This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 3290 – Rep. Edward Coppinger, D., Boston, **AN ACT REL-**

ATIVE TO THE DROPOUT AGE This bill would allow individual school districts to set their own “dropout age” by making the following amendment to Ch. 69, Sec. 1B: (inserting after the word “attendance”, in line 113, the following words): “provided, however, that the board shall allow each local school district to establish the mandatory minimum age that a student is required to attend school if the student has not yet graduated from high school.” The bill was referred to the Joint Education Committee back in January and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/2013 at 10:00 AM in Gardner Auditorium.

BILLS CREATING A STUDY OF AGE LIMITS FOR SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

H 378 – Rep. James J. Dwyer, D. Woburn; **AN ACT RELATIVE TO THE MAXIMUM AGE OF ENROLLMENT** This bill directs the Board of Education to “conduct a comprehensive review of the present age limits for student enrollment in public schools in the Commonwealth. . . .” At the end of such review, the Board shall establish the mandatory maximum age for school attendance. This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

H 341 – Rep. Garrett J. Bradley, D. Hingham; **RESOLVE PROVIDING FOR A STUDY OF COMPULSORY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE** This petition and resolution seeks to authorize and direct the Board of Education to “conduct a study relative to the establishment of ages five to eighteen years old as the period of compulsory school attendance in Massachusetts. Such study shall include, but not be limited to, analyses of the impact of the altered requirements on student’s readiness for elementary school, and on high school completion, with due attention to the experience in other states; and analyses of fiscal implications for the commonwealth and for school districts.” The Board of Education shall report the results of the study by December 31, 2013. H 341 was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13 and is scheduled for hearing 10/3/13 from 10am-1pm in Gardner Auditorium.

BILLS CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL TESTING AND GRADUATION

H 432 – Rep. Bradley H. Jones, Jr., R. North Reading; **AN ACT RELATIVE TO NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT ACCESS TO THE MCAS EXAM** This bill would amend Chapter 69 to allow a non-public school student to elect to take the MCAS exam at that student’s own expense. This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 4/9/13 with no further action.

H 504 – Rep. Benjamin Sawin, D. Springfield; **AN ACT TO ELIMINATE THE USE OF THE MCAS FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION** This bill would eliminate the MCAS or other state-developed, standardized test, as a component of the competency determination for high school graduation. This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 4/9/13 but no further action has been taken.

H 348 – Rep. Antonio Cabral, D. New Bedford; **AN ACT TO ESTABLISH A NEW HIGH SCHOOL DIPLOMA** This bill would amend Chapter 69, Section 1D to allow students who pass the MCAS to receive a “Commonwealth Diploma issued by the state Department of Education. Students who have demonstrated competency under this section by meeting the academic

standards and curriculum frameworks enumerated in this section by satisfying the requirements of their local school committee shall be granted a Horace Mann Diploma issued by the local school committee. Students may receive either one or both diplomas. Issuance of either the Commonwealth or the Horace Mann Diploma to a student will certify that a student has met the competency determination described in this section and will entitle a student to all the rights and privileges of high school graduation." This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 4/9/13 but no further action has been taken.

BILL IMPOSING MORATORIUM ON EDUCATION EXPENSES

H 373 – Rep. James R. Dwyer, D. Woburn; AN ACT IMPOSING A MORATORIUM ON NEW MANDATED EDUCATION PROGRAMS AND EXPENSES This bill would require the General Court to impose a moratorium on newly mandated education programs and expenses until July 1, 2015. The bill would presumably prevent the imposition and funding of changes to the compulsory attendance laws, or any other educational legislation described above. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. A hearing was held on 6/27/13 but no further action has been taken.

Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers . . .

The Power of Music

By Patricia Zarate

Sometimes homeschooling families worry about the pace of their children's emotional, behavioral, and physical development. In my years of homeschooling I've noticed that responses to this concern rarely include music as a solution. My view is that because music works at every level in the brain, all human challenges could be eased with music, from sleeping in newborns, to dying in the terminally ill, from learning to walk, to learning math drills.

Music is a natural phenomenon that directly affects humans at every level possible, including physical, emotional, and spiritual levels. I have experimented with music for over twenty years. I've used it in homeschooling for over ten years. Whenever my three children, my husband, and I, who are all musicians, encounter issues with our family, we use music to solve them, from relaxation exercises with music to starting a difficult conversation. When we want to learn about a new culture, we start by researching the music.

All of the suggestions that follow could be done with all children no matter what their circumstances. I have tried music with children with brain damage who can move only one finger in their bodies, as well as with other children, including mine, and the result is almost always the same: joy, learning, and development. I have experimented with myself (an ex "problem child"), with my husband, and with both of my grandparents when they were terminally ill.

When I feel overwhelmed by the children and work, I take a break and try different relaxation techniques with music, or I purposely put calm music on for the children to relax and be quiet.

Whenever there is any tension in my marriage, I have found that going to high quality concerts helps our relationship at a deeper level because we get out of the house, take a break from the children, and enjoy something together. We always feel a need to talk after the concert and discuss every single aspect of the music over a drink. We agree and disagree about the music we heard; we express our feelings, reflect, and start asking ourselves why we do music in the first place. We start "talking and communicating" again, so going to a concert becomes a nice transition from being angry at each other to communicating and expressing ourselves and finding common ground.

Added to that, the jazz songs we used to hear when we were young and falling in love with each other 18 years ago always remind us how far we have come as a family. One day we set the pictures of the delivery of our first child to music and we started crying because it reminded us of how hard it was for us to have our first baby, and at the same time we realized how blessed we are to still have each other.

I have also experimented with my grandmother when she was terminally ill after many years living with dementia. I had to go to Chile for four days to say good bye. I teamed up with my cousin, Veronica, who is a Reiki Therapist and we gave our grandmother a combination of therapies, including music, for those four days. In addition to a CD with the familiar nature sounds of birds, wind and water, we brought her flowers, and we used aromatherapy (eucalyptus, which was a very common smell 20 years ago before the deforestation of the eucalyptus trees). Even though my grandmother had major brain damage and dementia — she could recognize no one and nothing around her, could not move or talk — during those four days she "woke up" at least once a day for just a couple of minutes and became totally normal, recognizing both my cousin and me, saying our names, hearing us when we told her that we loved her, and telling us she loved us back, expressing that her head hurt (from severe brain hemorrhages), but that overall she was feeling much better. After a couple of minutes she would collapse again. Just having one minute to say good bye to her in the right state of mind was therapeutic for all of us and I have never felt better about death than after that experience.

Something similar happened with my grandfather when he was dying and I went to Chile to say good bye. He was in a bed, not moving or talking, with severe dementia, unable to recognize anyone or anything. Since he did not recognize me, none of my tricks to communicate with him worked. I decided to take the guitar out and start singing. He heard the song, opened his eyes, and started singing his lungs out. We sang the song together loud and clear, looked at each other, smiled, and when the song ended, he went back to his death bed state and died days later.

Music can be used with children even if you think you have no musical skills. For example, take the well-known song "Twinkle Twinkle Little Star" and change the lyrics to adjust it for your needs: "Twinkle, twinkle, little star, how I wonder what you are" could become, "Twinkle, twinkle, brush your teeth, right before it's time to sleep" or, "Twinkle, twinkle let's go far, buckle up before we start" or, "Twinkle, sprinkle, time to start, potty time means candy bar."

Here are 10 suggestions for parents about including as much music in your life as possible:

1. Find beautiful music you like to hear in your house, while cooking or playing or doing anything else. Think about the music, tell your children why you like that music. Talk about the music with your children, and explain to them why that music makes you happy. Music can be a great start as a transition for bedtime: as the song fades out and a soft story begins, it's much easier to move into silence.
2. When someone is happy playing quietly, reading, or drawing, put on some meditation music, jazz, classical, world or ballads. I have experimented with this and thanks to music any quiet activity becomes three times longer, more efficient, and more attention to detail is achieved. For families who live in a heavily congested, high noise, urban environment, try closing the windows to muffle the sounds and play CDs with bird songs or bird calls. I love to do this with aromatherapy — especially eucalyptus, which at one point in my childhood was the main smell in my great grandmother's house.
3. While pregnant, listen to lots of music and go to many live concerts. The fetus can feel the music from the inside.
4. Start listening to music with your children from the moment they're born. There are several music programs that serve babies. I recommend Music Together.
5. Find out more about the power of music by reading about the newest research on the American Music Therapy Association website. You can also Google "music and the brain" and you will find many institutes, including one at Harvard University, that have devoted years of research to this topic and many papers are online and free of charge. There is also a Music Therapy Symposium that the Berklee College of Music Music Therapy Department organizes every year in Boston, which is free of charge.
6. For children who are considered to have behavioral difficulties or hyperactivity, you can try having one music therapy session every week, or every two weeks, in addition to regular music lessons. To find a Music Therapist close to you, refer to the American Music Therapy Association.
7. Find some time during the week when children can play their music, even if it is something you dislike, and talk about why he/she likes it and why you don't. Be rational and research why that music does not connect with you.
8. Go to as many concerts as possible. There are many free outdoor concerts during the summer in Massachusetts, which are great for babies and young children who need to move all the time.
9. Register your child for music lessons in your community or at home. Any instrument is OK. Many children don't like to practice, and this is normal. Try different instruments until they fall in love with one and like practicing it. Don't push your child into music. If he/she dislikes a music teacher, change teachers; music should not be painful. If he/she does not want to enroll in a music school, that's OK — there are many other ways you can include music in your life.
10. Start playing an instrument yourself. Struggle with it in front of your children and struggle together as a band. It is incredible how many values you can practice with your children through the performance of music and the art of improvisation. Taking turns, tolerance, sharing, perseverance, silence, attention to detail, leadership, following and supporting, spontaneous creation, and many other things could be learned while performing.

I hope this helps.

Born and raised in Chile, saxophonist Patricia Zarate moved to the US at age 20. She holds a Bachelors in Music Therapy from Berklee College of Music and a Masters in Jazz Studies from NYU. She is the founder of the Latin American Music Therapy Symposium and currently works as the Executive Director of the Panama Jazz Festival. She homeschools her three children ages 2, 7 and 9 in Quincy, Massachusetts, and has also homeschooled her adopted children from Panama with her husband, UNESCO Artist for Peace, Danilo Perez.

SPECIAL NOTICE!

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

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