



# AHEM News

Volume 11 • No 2 • Winter 2014

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

**What  
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Dear AHEM Friends,

Congratulations on an impressive TEN years of supporting one another on our homeschooling journeys! I was particularly impressed and inspired by Sophia Sayigh's keynote at our recent 10th anniversary conference when she upheld the difference between a community and network. We come together supporting one another on these unique educational paths we have chosen for our families. I will forever appreciate the many of you who have volunteered on behalf of AHEM by sharing your wisdom in written or spoken form, your talents by leading events or field trips, and your time by doing one of countless tasks required to do all that AHEM does. YOU have enabled me to homeschool with more confidence, trust, and joy! Thank you!!

As our Treasurer, I occasionally meet people who know of and greatly appreciate the work AHEM does, but that don't know who makes it happen. Some people seem to think that there are dozens of volunteers running AHEM. And while there are dozens of us volunteering in small ways over the course of the year, there are only a few regularly doing all the work required to offer the amazing support that AHEM provides. Many of us have volunteered some of our time to keep AHEM growing and thriving, but a small team of people are the "heart and soul" of the work AHEM does. Sophia Sayigh and Milva McDonald were two of the three original founders of AHEM and continue to be our worker bees. Without them and the core team of AHEM Board members and volunteers, I honestly believe there would be no AHEM.

Every other year, AHEM hosts a fundraiser to raise money to cover our very modest operating costs. Since we pay no one, our only expenses are the supplies and communication type costs necessary for educating new homeschoolers, monitoring legislation, supporting the Massachusetts homeschooling community, and for special outreach projects, such as library mailings, State House Day, and workshops.

While the annual costs hold in the one to two thousand dollar range, we do need to somehow acquire money to cover them. We could host another fundraiser in 2014 OR we could try something different in honor of our 10th anniversary. In the spirit of the generosity that Milva and Sophia have shared with us for ten years, I would like to propose that each of us give a gift. Knowing that a good percentage of the work for a 2014 fundraiser would end up being done by Sophia and Milva, let's just raise the money without them doing the work. If each of us donates just \$10 or \$20, we can make this happen. I know that not all of us can afford this (I am a single mom, so I do really understand), but please... those of you who can afford a donation, consider making one today. AHEM will cover its costs for the next year and we won't be asking for extra work from our incredible

leaders. Let's do it! Please make AHEM the recipient of one of your 2013 charitable donations.

Donate securely online via our website at <http://www.ahem.info/AboutAHem.html> or mail a check to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474.

Sincerely,  
*Roberta Altamari*  
Volunteer Treasurer for AHEM, 2010-2013

## 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 began in January 2013 and runs for two years. The Legislature has held hearings on many of the bills summarized below but has not yet taken significant action on the bills concerning compulsory attendance age. It has consolidated some of the bills concerning MCAS testing and other educational expenses and recommended studies of those costs. We will likely see further activity on all of these bills in the new year.

#### BILLS CONCERNING HIGH SCHOOL TESTING AND GRADUATION

**H 3723** – Joint Committee on Education; AN ACT RELATIVE TO NON-PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENT ACCESS TO THE MCAS EXAM This bill is a redraft of H 432, which had sought to amend Chapter 69 to allow a non-public school student to elect to take the MCAS exam at that student's own expense. The redrafted H 3723 instead directs the Department of Education to issue a report within six months to the Legislature

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### **Legislative Update** *continued from page 1*

“on the feasibility and costs associated with non-public school students and **home schooled students** in grade 10 voluntarily taking” the MCAS exam. On 10/28/13 the Joint Education Committee reported H 3723 favorably (recommended its passage) and referred it to the House Ways and Means Committee for review.

**H 504** – Rep. Benjamin Sawn, 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 and a hearing was held on 4/9/13. H 348 now accompanies H 453, S 219, and H 385, which all seek to provide a method for determining educational competence (including for students with learning disabilities). The bills were reported favorably by the Joint Education Committee on 10/28/13 and referred to the House Ways and Means Committee for review.

### **BILL IMPOSING MORATORIUM ON EDUCATION EXPENSES**

**H 3722** – Joint Committee on Education; This bill is a redraft of H 373 and several other bills regarding educational funding. H 373 had sought to impose a moratorium on newly mandated education programs and expenses until July 1, 2015. H 3722 seeks to create a new task force to review existing educational mandates and reporting requirements for school districts and advise the Legislature regarding which mandates may be consolidated or eliminated as outdated. Further, “Prior to issuing its recommendations, the task force shall conduct at least one public hearing to receive testimony from members of the public.” On 10/28/13 the Joint Education Committee reported the bill favorably and referred it to the House Ways and Means Committee for review.

### **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 attendance age, phased in over the next

four years, from sixteen to eighteen. It would also establish programs for identifying and helping students at risk of “dropping out” of high school. The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**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. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**H 350** – Rep. Antonio Cabral, D. New Bedford; AN ACT TO REQUIRE SCHOOL ATTENDANCE UP TO AGE EIGHTEEN OR UNTIL GRADUATION This bill would amend Chapter 76 of the General Laws by requiring school attendance between the ages of six and eighteen, “having completed at least the 12th grade or whichever comes first.” The bill would take effect August 1, 2015. It was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**H 338** – Rep. Garrett J. Bradley, D. Hingham; AN ACT RAISING THE COMPULSORY ATTENDANCE AGE TO 18 This bill would amend Chapter 69 of the General Laws to state that “all children under the age of 18 shall be required to attend school if they have not graduated.” The bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**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. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**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 by amending Section 1B, Ch. 69, “or section 1 of chapter 76, of the General Laws or any other general or special law to the contrary regulating the compulsory age of school attendance, the compulsory maximum age for school attendance in Boston public and private schools shall be eighteen (18). Children under the age of 18, attending a Boston public or private school, shall remain enrolled until such time as they turn 18, or upon

successful completion of all coursework required to graduate. SECTION 2. This act shall take effect on July 1, 2012 and shall concern all students enrolled in Boston public and private schools for the 2012-13 school year and onward.” The city of Boston has already provided local approval. H376 was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**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,” notwithstanding the mandatory maximum age otherwise established by the State Board of Education. The City of Lawrence has already approved the bill. This bill was referred to the Joint Committee on Education on 1/22/13. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**H 3290**, Rep. Edward Coppinger, D., Boston, **AN ACT RELATIVE 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. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

#### **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. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

**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. It was scheduled for hearing on 10/8/13 but no further action has been taken.

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## **Student Government Day**

### **Friday, April 4, 2014**

AHEM is thrilled to announce that homeschoolers will once again be able to participate in Student Government Day on April 4, 2014 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 at [www.ahem.info/Documents/NominationForm.pdf](http://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 December 13, 2013 at the latest.**

*Student Government Day continued on page 4*

### Student Government Day *continued from page 3*

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 4, 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 <http://www.massrmv.com/>).
- Nominees must read and sign the Consent Form for Student Government Day Activities (<http://www.ahem.info/Documents/ConsentForm.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.

See the answers to frequently asked questions regarding Student Government Day (SGD) here: [www.doe.mass.edu/famcomm/student/sgd\\_faq.html](http://www.doe.mass.edu/famcomm/student/sgd_faq.html)

Questions? Email [info@ahem.info](mailto:info@ahem.info).

### **AHEM Salon Series**

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

On January 15, the series begins with Getting Started Homeschooling.

Future topics in the series include:

- Rebel, Rebel: Being a Free Thinker in a Culture of Conformity,
- You Say Apples, I Say Oranges: Fruitful Coexistence Among Homeschoolers,
- Homeschooling Without Walls: Freeing Ourselves from Definitions and Labels, and
- Teens and College Admissions

The discussions 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 \$15/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.

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

Visit the AHEM Events page at [www.ahem.info/Events.html](http://www.ahem.info/Events.html) for all the details on time, location, and how to pre-register.



[www.facebook.com/AHEM.ma](http://www.facebook.com/AHEM.ma)

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### **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): \_\_\_\_\_

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City/Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

**Cut on dotted line and mail to:**

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Arlington, MA 02474

\*If you *do* have Internet access and want to keep hearing from us, Visit [www.ahem.info/BecomeaFriendofAHEM.html](http://www.ahem.info/BecomeaFriendofAHEM.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.

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