



AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

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

State House Day — Thursday, April 14, 2011

**Join AHem for a fun day in Boston
visiting the State House!**

Schedule of Activities

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM	State House Scavenger Hunt and/or Delivering Packets to Legislators
11:00 AM	Short talk by Representative Ted Speliotis of the 13 th Essex District, followed by a photo opportunity with Rep. Speliotis (may fill — preregistration required)
Noon	State House Tour (pre-registration required)

10:00 AM – 1:00 PM

State House Scavenger Hunt and/or Delivering Packets to Legislators

2011 brings a new group of legislators to the State House, so to encourage Massachusetts homeschoolers to meet their representatives, AHem is sponsoring an event on **Thursday, April 14, 2011** for homeschoolers to hand out packets with information about homeschooling to legislators. Packets will include a *Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers* brochure, a Rolodex card, and pen. A fun scavenger hunt with a small prize for all who participate will be part of the morning. This activity is appropriate for all ages.

Meet in Doric Hall on the second floor of the State House to pick up the scavenger hunt and/or packets to deliver to legislators. AHem representatives will be available there between 10:00 AM and 1:00 PM, but we encourage you to arrive as close to 10:00 AM as possible to allow enough time to complete the scavenger hunt and help with packet delivery.

Consider calling your representatives to make an appointment to meet them while at the State House. You are more likely to meet them instead of an aide if you make arrangements in advance. If you're not sure who your representatives are, you can find out here: <http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php>

Cost: Free. Walk-ins will be accommodated for the State House Scavenger Hunt, but we can plan better for the event if you take the time to pre-register, so we strongly encourage registering in advance.

Tip: This State House visit would nicely complement the *AHEM Unit Study on Massachusetts History and Government*. For information on the *Unit Study* and how to request it, visit <http://www.ahem.info/UnitStudy.htm>

11:00 AM

Talk by Representative Ted Speliotis, 13th Essex

Rep. Speliotis will give a short talk. Students will be able to ask questions. The talk will be followed by a photo opportunity of the Representative with our group. You can find out more about Rep. Speliotis here: <http://www.malegislature.gov/People/Profile/TCS1>

Cost: Free, but please register in advance.

Space is limited and we may not be able to accommodate all who are interested.

Noon

State House Tour

Tour our magnificent State House, a building which Oliver Wendell Holmes called “the hub of the solar system.” The oldest building on Beacon Hill, the State House is brimming with history, art, and culture. Within its grandiose architecture are statues, paintings, flags from almost every town and city in Massachusetts, and, of course, legislators from the same. The tour lasts approximately 30 – 45 minutes and includes an overview of the history and architecture of the State Capitol.

Cost: Free, but please register in advance. (Registration form on back page of this newsletter.)

Websites:

Secretary of the Commonwealth's Kids' Zone <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/cis/ciskid/kididx.htm>

Interactive State House: an evolving collection of online history resources <http://www.mass.gov/statehouse/index.htm>

Connecting with Elected Officials <http://www.ahem.info/ConnectingwithElectedOfficials.htm>

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Current State Issues . . .

Legislative Update

The 187th Massachusetts Legislative session (2011-2012) is now underway and our legislators are in the process of filing new bills. AHem is monitoring all new bills filed that have the potential to impact homeschoolers in our state. The following bills were filed within the first few months of the new session:

H 1909, Rep. Antonio Cabral, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep.

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Spending the afternoon in the city:

See below for some ideas on how to spend the afternoon in the city. More ideas here: <http://www.ahem.info/ExploringMassachusetts.htm>.

How to register

We're glad that you are interested in joining us on April 14!

To register, please:

- Download a registration form in .pdf format here: <http://www.ahem.info/20110414registrationform.pdf>.
- Write **check** to AHEM for any donation and
- Return it all in an envelope addressed to **AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474**.

Space for Rep. Speliotis's talk and the State House tour is **limited**; spots are allotted in the order registrations are received. **Registrations must be postmarked no later than March 25, 2011**. Registration confirmation will be sent via email (preferred) or enclose a stamped, self-addressed envelope or postcard.

Participants will be added to the Friends of AHEM list unless they specifically opt out.

Directions:

Directions to the State House: <http://www.sec.state.ma.us/trs/trsdir/diridx.htm>. We recommend taking the T: Take the Red Line to Park Street Station. Once outside the station walk up Park Street toward the State House. www.mbta.com

If you drive, there is parking at the Boston Common Garage. The entrance to the Boston Common Garage is located on Charles Street, directly across from the Public Gardens.

Directions to the garage:

http://www.mccahome.com/bcg_dir.html

1:00 PM & on Lunch & exploring Boston on your own

There are many options for lunch: Pack a brown bag lunch, find fast food at Downtown Crossing, discover an eclectic café on Charles St., or head to Chinatown.

Public Garden — For families with young children a nice choice might be to picnic in the Public Garden, followed by a visit to the *Make Way for Ducklings* statues. For older kids E. B. White's *The Trumpet of the Swan* and/or Esther Forbes's *Johnny Tremain* provide interesting context for a visit to downtown Boston.

Freedom Trail: Or start the Freedom Trail and find lunch along the way, perhaps at one of the many options in the food court at Faneuil Hall. The Freedom Trail is a 2.5 mile red brick or red painted line that travels through Beacon Hill, downtown Boston, the North End, and Charlestown. The Trail itself is an outdoor experience, but the sites it leads you to should be entered to be fully appreciated. Walking is easy and pleasant for able-bodied people of all ages. The National Parks Boston Downtown Visitor Center, 15 State St., right in the heart of Boston, distributes free maps, brochures, and information on the Freedom Trail and the Boston area. <http://www.nps.gov/bost/planyourvisit/index.htm>

Boston African American National Historic Site: 8 Smith Court, Boston, MA 02114-4007. In the 19th century, Boston's Beacon Hill was home to a vibrant African-American community. Composed of 14 historic sites, the 1.6 mile walking trail tells a vivid story about the lives of free African Americans and white abolitionists whose efforts helped change the nation. Self-guided tours can be conducted at any time, Monday through Sunday. Maps and site brochures can be obtained at the African Meeting House (8 Smith Court) during site hours or at the Boston Common Visitors Center, Tremont St. Telephone: (617) 725 0022; Website: www.afroammuseum.org.

For further information

For further information about State House Day, email us at info@ahem.info, or call 781-641-0566.

Hope to see you on April 14!

~ The State House Day Planning Committee

Legislative Update continued from page 1

Stephen R. Canessa, Democrat, New Bedford; Rep. Kay Khan, Democrat, Newton; A PETITION RELATIVE TO THE IMPLEMENTATION OF 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."

This bill would effectively lower the required school attendance age by making kindergarten mandatory. Home-schoolers 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.

H 1081, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, A PETITION

RELATIVE TO 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.

H 1964, Rep. Martha M. Walz, Democrat, Boston, and others; A PETITION FOR LEGISLATION TO REDUCE THE DROPOUT RATE OF STUDENTS IN THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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.

S 1743, Rep. John A. Hart, Democrat, Boston A PETITION FOR LEGISLATION TO DENY DRIVER’S LICENSES TO 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 governing 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.

AHEM has contacted the offices of Rep. Walz and Sen. Hart to clarify how certain wording in the bills would affect homeschoolers. 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 members informed about additional proposed legislation that could impact MA homeschoolers.

Clearing Our Throats . . .

Virtual Schools and Homeschool Freedoms

Virtual public schools have finally come to Massachusetts, in the form of the Massachusetts Virtual Academy at Greenfield. Since public charter and e-schools began popping up, there has been national concern about whether these new entities will present a threat to homeschool freedoms.

The key point . . .

The most important point in any discussion of public virtual schools and homeschools is that they are two different things.

When a child is enrolled in a public virtual school, that child is a public school student, and must report to the school according to the virtual school’s requirements, as well as take state assessment tests, including MCAS. The family is no longer in charge of determining how and when their child is educated. When a child is enrolled in a public virtual school, that family is receiving a curriculum funded by public monies and appropriate accountability for all parties is in play. By contrast, homeschoolers do not accept public monies, are not on the rolls of the public schools, and retain responsibility for and decision-making power over their children’s education. Homeschoolers particularly prize this freedom, and retaining the legal right to exercise it is of prominent importance to homeschoolers as well as to the retention of vibrancy and diversity in the palette of educational choices. Clarity about the differences between homeschools and public virtual schools is essential in achieving that objective.

Differences between homeschoolers and virtual school students in MA	
Homeschoolers	Public virtual schoolers
Independent	Public school students
May choose method of education	Must use curriculum provided
Produce their children’s evaluations	Must be evaluated by school
Don’t take MCAS	Must take MCAS
Don’t accept public monies	Accept public monies

The bottom line . . .

The creation of public virtual schools is attractive to private companies for financial reasons. A school district in Massachusetts creating a virtual school may also be motivated by financial reasons, because that district can receive per pupil funding for any out-of-district students who enroll. Schools in Massachusetts receive no per pupil funding for homeschoolers, but when homeschoolers enroll in virtual public schools and change their status to public school students, the school district in which the virtual school is based gets the funding. Meanwhile, the actual cost to the virtual public school is much lower than for a student who attends the brick-and-mortar building, since the child is at home and only needs minimal equipment, materials, and oversight by teachers.

Virtual schools also provide a way for public schools to draw homeschoolers into the public school system. This has been written about extensively by Patricia Lines in papers and publications including “Support for Home-Based Education.” The 2003 booklet is geared specifically toward state policymakers, local boards of education, and school administrators. In it, she makes a case for creating virtual schools as a way of drawing homeschoolers back into the system: “The development of programs for home study offered by public schools will also contribute to the growth of home-based education. However, such offerings may actually reduce the growth of independent homeschooling.” (Lines, p. 8).

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In other states with public virtual schools, homeschoolers have been targeted as a potential market for enrollment. AHEM supports every family's right to choose how their child will be educated, but in this case it is important that families understand that they are being directly marketed to by the combination of a for-profit entity and a public school district that is seeking to regain funding. Families should assess the option as carefully as they would evaluate any other advertised product. Claims of "free" curriculum and computers, for instance, may have strings attached, in that they may only be on loan for the duration of the child's enrollment. Parents should read carefully between the lines to determine the validity of these advertising claims.

Coexisting...

Virtual school students who were formerly homeschoolers may want to retain that label. However, for the sake of clarity and accuracy, correct language is important. Acceptance of and respect for all educational choices is fundamental to getting along and fostering an environment where diversity in education is seen as a vital and necessary part of our society. Understanding the difference between and maintaining clarity about the ever-changing educational choices available to families in Massachusetts is a key step in protecting those options for all.

Around AHEM . . .

Faces at AHEM: Meet Cindy Turner

Cynthia (Cindy) Turner lives in Framingham with her husband and daughters Cassandra (10 going on 11) and Rebecca (6). Her family is in their fifth year without compulsory schooling and has no plans to ever change that. Cindy made a point of bringing Cassandra over to meet John Taylor Gatto 1½ years ago during a homeschoolers vacation week at which Gatto spoke so she could remember shaking his hand. Afterward Cindy said to Cassandra, "Remember meeting Mr. Gatto. He is one of the single most important people related to learning in freedom that you will ever meet." From snuggling up with books to getting together with friends to day trips, she and the girls enjoy each other as well as exploring new and enriching things that life has to offer.

Originally from the Philly area (as is her husband) from a large and humorous family, Cindy enjoys meeting people, singing, strolling and hiking in the woods, writing, hanging with the Turner clan, playing games (including poker), reading with her girls, road trips, and more. Cindy is and has been a family advocate through various means, including home education, crisis pregnancy work, paid employment working with families in shelters, the Metrowest chapter of Mothers and More, volunteer work on behalf of feminism, and in everyday personal ways. She is an enthusiastic advocate of educational freedoms, striving to become very well versed in such issues, and is quite happy to have become a volunteer and, recently, a County Contact for AHEM.



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Become a Friend of AHEM

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

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.

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! . . .

Why Are You Getting This Newsletter?

You are receiving this paper copy of the newsletter through the mail instead of our timely announcement-only emails because we have you listed as a Friend of AHEM, but either the email address we have for you has been bouncing, or we don't have an email address for you. We'd appreciate hearing from you with an updated email address in order to conserve paper and postage, and to keep our costs down.

If you would like to keep receiving this paper version of the newsletter, please consider making a tax-deductible donation to AHEM to support efforts like sending this newsletter to Massachusetts homeschoolers who don't have computer access. And please pass your newsletter on to a friend or leave it in your local library when you're done with it. Thanks!

If you don't wish to receive this newsletter, please take a moment to let us know and we will stop sending it. Either email info@ahem.info, call 781-641-0566, or drop us a line at AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. We really appreciate your help in keeping our lists current.