



AHEM News

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

Volume 11 • No 3 • Spring 2014

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

Clearing Our Throats . . .

Evaluating Evaluations

In Massachusetts, homeschooling parents, as the teachers of their children, are responsible for evaluating their progress. *CARE AND PROTECTION OF CHARLES & others*, 399 Mass. 324 (1987) clearly outlines three forms of evaluation: "Other means of evaluating the progress of the children may be substituted for the formal testing process, such as periodic progress reports or dated work samples, subject to the approval of the parents." (*Charles* at 340) Parents may choose one of them to fulfill their responsibility.

Charles is clear that parents are the instructors and it is appropriate and acceptable for parents to evaluate their students' progress. AHEM's research shows that almost half of Massachusetts homeschoolers choose to submit a progress report, making it the most popular choice.

Recently, AHEM has heard from homeschoolers in various districts where school officials are hesitant to accept the authority of evaluations by parents. In these cases, schools request standardized test scores, extensive work samples, third party evaluations, or a parent-produced progress report combined with a second form of evaluation, such as work samples.

While school officials in the professionalized world of education may not want to accept parental evaluations as valid, the law in Massachusetts clearly allows parental evaluation. Homeschooling parents who want to choose a progress report as their form of evaluation need not be intimidated by demands for more.

Here's one example of a way that a district might question your authority to evaluate the education of your children: In some districts, school officials create forms to facilitate their responsibility for homeschool oversight. Sometimes, the list of evaluation choices offered doesn't include "progress report," but may or may not include "other." Homeschoolers can either write in "progress report" under the "other" category, or create an "other" category and write in "progress report."

Some districts send out "conditional" approval letters stating that the education plan approval is "conditioned" on the submission of extra forms of evaluation. The response to such a letter could be based on various factors including the homeschooling family's past experience with the district, or the school official's track record with homeschoolers. One response could be to do nothing and submit the evaluation outlined in the original plan. Another option could be to respond with a letter thanking the school for the approval and reiterating that the form of evaluation outlined in the original

plan will be submitted at the appropriate time.

Individual circumstances play a big role when determining how to respond to requests from school officials. As always, AHEM representatives are available to talk through options; just check our website for the contact in your area: www.ahem.info/CountyContacts.html.

This legal summary was not drafted by practicing lawyers and is not intended to constitute official legal advice, but rather is presented by AHEM volunteers and is based on their reading and understanding of Massachusetts homeschooling requirements as they have followed those requirements throughout the years. Readers still need to make their own decision on how best to proceed.

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 have an impact on Massachusetts homeschoolers. The current session began in January 2013 and runs for two years.

On Tuesday, March 4, 2014, the Joint Committee on Education held an Executive Session, "a committee meeting during which the committee members decide upon the report type to be filed with a clerk for consideration by the larger body and (if discharge, favorable, study or extension) to which branch the report will be submitted." [<https://malegislature.gov/Site/Glossary>]

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S 208, AN ACT RELATIVE TO DROPOUT PREVENTION AND RECOVERY, was reported favorably out of committee, was given its first reading, and has now been referred to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means for further review. You can see the full text of the bill, bill history, and petitioners here: <https://malegislature.gov/Bills/188/Senate/S208>. It was accompanied by H338, H341, H350, H368, H376, H523, H524, H525, H3290 and S283.

S 208 would amend both Chapters 69 and 76 of the General Laws 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.

AHEM is opposed to this bill and sent a letter to be included in the official testimony for the hearing, which was held on October 8, 2013. We wrote, in summary:

- Raising the compulsory attendance age would be ineffective in reducing the dropout rate. In fact, statistics demonstrate that states requiring attendance until age sixteen have a lower dropout rate than those states compelling attendance until ages seventeen or eighteen.
- Raising the compulsory attendance age would result in increased spending for school departments. Furthermore, raising the age would take away resources from potentially effective remedies to reduce the dropout age in favor of increased costs for teachers’ salaries, classrooms, and transportation.
- Additionally, we are concerned that raising the age to 18 could remove alternatives, such as early graduation, from motivated students for whom traditional public school is not working.

If you share our concern, you can write to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. Because the Ways and Means Committee is charged with considering all matters relating to the finances of the Commonwealth, we recommend the following talking point: Since raising the compulsory attendance age would not result in a higher rate of high school completion, the financial burden to taxpayers and already fiscally strapped school departments cannot be justified. This is a universal concern, and will carry the most weight. Please let AHEM know if you reach out, and what response if any you receive.

We are not aware of any movement in the rest of the bills we have been following that could affect Massachusetts homeschoolers. You can read our previous update about them at our website: <http://www.ahem.info/LegislativeIssues.html>.

See The Logic Behind Our Legislative Alerts:
www.ahem.info/Logic.html

Public High School Diplomas and the High School Equivalency Assessment

Never fear! Although homeschooled students are not permitted to participate in the MCAS and, therefore, cannot fulfill the requirements of the competency determination or attain a high school diploma, high school diplomas are not necessary for homeschoolers to pursue college or other goals in the majority of cases. For most of homeschooling history in

Massachusetts, homeschoolers have gone on to pursue goals after homeschooling, including matriculating at selective universities, without diplomas.

Most colleges are familiar with homeschooled applicants, and are primarily interested in their portfolios, the meat of the application, considering a high school diploma or high school equivalency exam a bureaucratic box to check off. It is wise to check with places of interest, such as candidate colleges, workplaces, or the military to find out what their acceptance and matriculation requirements are.



High school diplomas are not necessary for federal financial aid. See <http://www.ahem.info/FAFSA.html>.

In cases where diplomas are required, the High School Equivalency Credential already exists as a widely accepted credential. The High School Equivalency Assessment is an appropriate test for students such as homeschoolers, who have embraced an alternative education style, to measure their knowledge and academic skills against those of today's traditional high school graduates.

As of 2014, Massachusetts has switched from the GED to the HiSET series of exams as the form of high school equivalency assessment. The HiSET website does not yet include information specific to Massachusetts. Policies specific to Massachusetts are in the process of being finalized for the website.

According to the Massachusetts Department of Education: “Massachusetts has for many years issued a High School Equivalency Credential, signed by the Commissioner of Education and indicating that the recipient of the credential has demonstrated the skills and knowledge of a high school graduate. The High School Equivalency Credential will continue to be the official document to show that a person has the skills and knowledge of a high school graduate. However, the assessment tool by which the Massachusetts High School Equivalency Credential is earned will change...

HiSET will measure the academic knowledge and proficiency equivalent to those of a high school graduate. HiSET will be available to Massachusetts adult learners beginning in late January or early February and will include assessments in Language Arts – Reading, Language Arts – Writing, Mathematics, Social Studies, and Science...”

The High School Equivalency Assessment and Homeschoolers

Ruth Derfler, Director, Alternative Adult High School Credentials at the Massachusetts Department of Education, clarified that a homeschooled age 16 or 17 can have the school write a letter stating that he or she is not enrolled, as he or she is a homeschooler, and that letter will qualify him or her to take the High School Equivalency Assessment. Ms. Derfler said that if a superintendent were confused about this policy and didn't want to honor a homeschooled student's request for a letter, they could call her (781-338-6604) to confirm.

AHEM Salon Series

Come partake in lively, stimulating discussion with fellow homeschooling parents in a relaxed, friendly environment.

On Tuesday, March 11, we'll meet in Medford, MA from 7:00 – 9:00 pm. The topic will be "You Say Apples, I Say Oranges: Fruitful Coexistence Among Homeschoolers."
<https://ahemyousayapples.eventbrite.com>

Finding solidarity with like-minded homeschoolers is rewarding and necessary for many of us. But sometimes the choice to homeschool is the only thing we find in common with the families around us. Some unschool, others stay home in the morning to do lessons, while still others choose experiential learning as the main focus of their children's education. To confound things further, the moms and dads around us might have completely different parenting styles, too. Our diverse homeschooling community is most certainly an asset, but challenges can arise in groups, classes, or activities. How can we handle accepting and embracing our differences while still honoring our own paths?

Exact location and directions will be provided to you after registration.

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 \$15/person (teen and adult) to reserve your spot; the full price will be refunded to you, making your participation FREE. If you don't show up, your money will be donated to support the non-profit mission of AHM.

Visit the AHM Events page at www.ahem.info/Events.html for all the details on time, location, and how to register. Space is limited. Salon Series participants will be added to the Friends of AHM list unless they specifically opt out.

Future topics in the series include:

- **Getting Started Homeschooling** (April in Arlington)
Whether you are actively considering home education or are just curious about how it is done, you are invited to attend this discussion. We'll be talking about deciding whether or not to homeschool, getting started, methods, resources, and homeschooling support. <https://ahemgettingstartedhomeschooling.eventbrite.com>
- **Homeschooling Without Walls: Freeing Ourselves from Definitions and Labels** (May in Medford)
Unschooler, school-at-home, eclectic, structured – trying to fit a homeschooler into one of these categories can be like trying to fit a square peg into a round hole. Let's face it: most homeschoolers are as unique as a thumbprint. In this salon, we'll discuss how labels help and/or hinder us, as well as the usefulness and limits of defining homeschooling and its offshoots. <https://homeschoolingwithoutwalls.eventbrite.com>
- **Teens & College Admissions** (June in Stow)

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

Visit the AHM Events page at www.ahem.info/Events.html for all the details on time, location, and how to pre-register.

Outreach!

Remember when you were considering homeschooling but you weren't sure where to find information about it?

AHEM's newly revised Considering Homeschooling brochure cuts to the chase with information on deciding to homeschool and getting started homeschooling in Massachusetts.

We'd love your help in getting more of them into the hands of people who need them: young families wondering about the homeschool option; parents of kids who are suffering in school and aren't sure where to turn; librarians who often get questions about homeschooling.

There are lots of helpful and effective ways to distribute the brochure:

- Leave a few at your public library with the Reference or Children's Librarian.
- Hand some out at informal gatherings like park days and support meetings.
- Have some available at homeschool information nights.
- Keep a few to mail to individuals who contact you looking for more information.
- Stash some in a glove compartment or backpack so that they're on hand when you need them.
- Leave a couple or post one anywhere that it's OK to leave free literature or post informational notices. Places that young parents frequent are prime ~ coffee shops, pediatricians' offices, nursery schools, libraries, grocery stores.

AHEM would be happy to provide you with copies of the brochure. Just reply to this email with name, address, and number of pamphlets desired and we'll get them right out to you.

Thanks for your help!

Educators' Discounts

AHEM has a web page that lists museums and retail stores that offer discounts to homeschoolers:
<http://www.ahem.info/EducatorsDiscounts.html>

Please send us more listings of Massachusetts stores and museums that offer discounts to homeschoolers. Include as much info as possible, including the name of a contact person if you have one.

AHEM Membership Cards

Any Massachusetts homeschooler can use a letter from their local school department as legal proof of homeschooling status. AHM has available "membership" cards. While they are not legal proof of homeschooling status, homeschoolers have found that many retailers do accept such cards as evidence of homeschooling, allowing homeschoolers to be eligible for educator discounts at various retail stores, most

notably book stores, arts and crafts stores, and educational supply stores. Anywhere that offers discounts to teachers is probably receptive to offering the same to homeschoolers. It can't hurt to ask! And don't forget to let us know if you have an addition to our Educators' Discounts page.

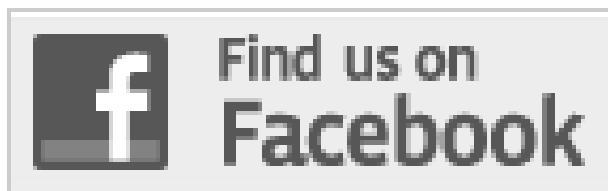
If you would like an AHEM membership card, please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to AHEM, PO Box 1307, Arlington, MA 02474. Indicate "membership card" on the envelope, and allow 4-6 weeks for delivery. People requesting cards will be added to the Friends of AHEM list, so include your email address as well if you have one, as that is our preferred form of communication.

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, subscribe at our website or fill out the form below.



www.facebook.com/AHEM.ma

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.

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): _____

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, Visit 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.

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