

AHEM News

Volume 3 • No 2 • Winter 2006

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.

What
you
need
to
know
when
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Clearing Our Throats . . .

The Logic Behind Our Legislative Alerts

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (AHEM) believes that informed and active homeschoolers are their own best advocates in maintaining the right to independently homeschool. One of our goals is to do our best to monitor legislation that has the potential to affect homeschoolers. We keep AHEM Friends informed about pending legislation through periodic updates and alerts. As an organization, we communicate with legislators when appropriate.

While AHEM sometimes takes a position on a piece of legislation, we do not assume that all homeschoolers will share this position. Our hope is that after being presented with the relevant information, homeschoolers will think through the issues and come to their own conclusions about where they stand. We welcome any questions, concerns, or comments regarding any legislation.

When communicating information about pending legislation, we try to present the issues in a clear, concise manner so that those concerned will have the information they need to make an informed decision about their position on a particular bill. When feasible, we provide contact information for appropriate legislators in the updates and alerts so that Friends can make contact regarding their own personal opinions.

We know that at times it can seem overwhelming and somewhat tedious to read through legislative alerts and updates. We all have our families as our number one priority. But if we want to keep homeschooling freedoms for our children and grandchildren — should we be so lucky — it is essential that we take an active role in understanding legislative issues and let our elected officials know where we stand when those freedoms are threatened.

We have had discussions with several legislators about how to have an impact on the legislative process. Across the board, they agreed that the use of form letters is not an effective way to defeat bills. These legislators have

said that when they receive form letters, they assume that the individual signing the letter is just a mouthpiece for an organization and the letter ends up in the circular file. Several legislators have used as an example of an effective campaign an effort by Massachusetts nurses to defeat a bill that would have negatively impacted their profession. The nurses wrote individual letters each giving his or her personal reasons why he or she did not want the bill to pass. One legislator told us that it was the most successful campaign he has ever seen, and that we can all learn from the way the nurses handled this particular bill. (If letter writing seems daunting, keep in mind that even a phone call to your representative stating your position, for or against, is better than nothing, and better than an AHEM-generated form letter.)

Ways you can take positive action right now

- Find out who your representatives are, add their emails to your address book and keep their phone numbers handy. Click here to search using your street address:
<http://www.wheredoivotema.com/bal/myelectioninfo.php>.
- Read *Taking Charge through Homeschooling* by Larry and Susan Kaseman, "to increase awareness of the political nature of everyday actions and of ways of becoming empowered through them."¹
- If you're inspired to go the extra mile, AHEM welcomes volunteers to help monitor legislation (a great civics lesson combined with community service). Find out more at
<http://www.ahem.info/VirtualVolunteers.htm>.

Current State Issues . . .

Legislative Watch

AHEM has been tracking several pieces of state legislation. At this time, all four bills we have been

¹ M. Larry and Susan D. Kaseman, *Taking Charge through Homeschooling: Personal and Political Empowerment* (Stoughton, WI: Koshkonong Press, 1990), p. 3.

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watching have been referred to a specific committee, and have had public hearings. The next step in the legislative process would be for the specific committees to meet in executive sessions to discuss the merits of the bills before the committees issue their reports, either recommending the bills "ought to pass" or "ought not to pass." At this time, none of the committees have reported on these bills.

SB 1907, "An Act Providing for the Denial of Driver's Licenses to Truants"

was filed by Senator Hart (Democrat - First Suffolk), Senator Brown (Republican - Norfolk, Bristol and Middlesex), Rep. Canavan (Democrat - Tenth Plymouth) and Rep. Fallon (Democrat - Thirty-third Middlesex). This bill, if passed, would require that all applicants for driver's licenses, between the ages of 16 - 18, provide a letter from school officials certifying that the applicant is enrolled in school and is meeting all academic and attendance requirements, or has received a high school diploma or certificate, or GED, . . . or "is enrolled in a home education program that satisfies the requirements of all state laws governing such courses." SB 1907 was

referred to the Joint committee on Transportation on January 26, 2005. Because of the potential impact on homeschoolers, AHEM contacted the sponsors of this bill, making our concerns known. You can read more about these concerns at

<http://www.ahem.info/SB1907.htm>.

On October 20, 2005, the Joint committee on Transportation held a public hearing on SB 1907 as well as similar bills, including SB 1912, which, if passed, would raise the minimum age for obtaining a driver's license to 18. Several homeschoolers either attended the public hearing or submitted written testimony to be included in the official record of the hearing. You can read the full text of the bill at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/st01/st01907.htm>. This bill is still with the Joint committee on Transportation.

HB 1044, "An Act Relative to Increasing the Mandatory School Age"

was filed by Rep. Marie St. Fleur (Democrat - Fifth Suffolk) and would require school attendance until the age of 18. This bill, if passed, would require homeschoolers to continue to report to their local school districts until such time as the homeschoolers reach "graduation" or the age of 18, whichever comes first. You can read more about this bill at <http://www.ahem.info/HB1044.htm>.

HB 1044 was referred to the Joint committee on Education on January 26, 2005. On September 22, 2005, a public hearing was held on this bill. The bill is still with the Joint committee on Education. The full text of the bill can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/ht01/ht01044.htm>.

HB 1220, "An Act Relative to Homeschooling"

was filed by Rep. Paul Loscocco (Republican - Eighth Middlesex) and would allow homeschoolers to take the MCAS at state expense. Schools would then be required to award diplomas to homeschoolers who pass MCAS and request a diploma. This bill was referred to the Joint committee on Education on January 1, 2005. A public hearing was held on May 5, 2005. AHEM representatives were in contact with Rep. Loscocco and his staff. We have also sent letters to all members of the Joint committee on Education to voice our concerns about this bill. You can read more about this bill at <http://www.ahem.info/HB1220.htm>. At this time, the bill has not moved from the Joint committee on Education. The full text of the bill can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/house/ht01/ht01220.htm>

SB 2125, "An Act Relative to Eligibility For a License to Operate a Motor Vehicle"

was filed by Senator

Richard Moore (Democrat - Worcester and Norfolk) and Rep. Paul Kujawski (Democrat - Eighth Worcester). This bill, if passed, would require a minor under 18 years of age to provide evidence that s/he is enrolled, and a student in good standing, in an educational program leading to a high school diploma or that s/he has graduated from high school in order to be issued a junior operator's license. It is unclear what the ramifications would be for homeschoolers. You can read more about this bill at <http://ahem.info/SB2125.htm>.

This bill has been referred to the Joint committee on Transportation. The committee held a public hearing on October 20, 2005. The bill has not moved from this committee. The full text of the bill can be found at <http://www.mass.gov/legis/bills/senate/st02/st02125.htm>.

AHEM will continue to monitor these bills and will update you as needed.

Summary of data from Massachusetts town homeschool policy and practice database, November 2005

Here are collated responses to Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts's questionnaire about homeschool policy and practice in Massachusetts. For over two 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. So far we have received 156 responses. The majority of respondents are people who receive regular AHEM updates either via email or US mail, although some respondents received the questionnaire as a forwarded email and others found it on our website. 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).

How much in advance of the school year do school officials ask that you submit homeschooling plans? What do you do? Please explain.

Most schools request that plans be filed before beginning to homeschool, or before the beginning of the school year. Some mention a specific amount of time prior, ranging from one week to one month before school starts. Most homeschoolers comply with this expectation, although there were no reports of problems if a plan was filed later than requested.

Do school officials ask to meet with homeschoolers? Do you comply? Please explain.

Sixty-seven percent of respondents report that school officials do not ask for face-to-face meetings (this is a four percent decrease in requests for meetings compared to last year). Eleven percent report that school officials asked for an initial meeting with homeschoolers when they filed their first plan (a two percent increase in such requests over last year); all but one of these complied. Twenty-two percent of homeschoolers are asked to meet annually with school officials (down six percent from last year). Slightly more than half of these choose to comply; slightly less than half do not. There were no negative consequences reported by those who chose not to meet with school officials. Overall this shows a decreased percentage of school officials asking for face-to-face meetings of any kind, while the response of homeschoolers to such requests remains about the same proportionately.

Do school officials ask to visit your home? Do you comply? Please explain.

Ninety-four percent of respondents do not have school officials ask to visit their homes. There were no negative consequences for not agreeing to a home visit. Indeed, the 1998 *Brunelle* Supreme Court decision made it clear that home visits cannot be required as a condition of approval.

"School policies that exceed *Charles and Brunelle* do not have to be adhered to by homeschoolers."

Do school officials ask for a schedule or number of hours on each subject? Do you comply? Please explain.

Seventy percent of respondents are asked to supply a schedule, number of hours per subject, or some statement regarding hours. Of these, 41% supply a schedule (29% of *all* respondents – no change from last year), 29% do not, and 27% specified that instead, they state that they will meet or exceed the 900/990 hours of instruction required in the public schools. There were no negative consequences for those who chose to give the broader answer rather than a grid type schedule. See *Tips for Writing your Education Plan* <http://www.ahem.info/TipsforWritingYourEdPlan.htm> for ways to satisfy the request for a schedule without going into needless detail. Twenty percent of respondents are asked if they will meet or exceed the 900/990 hours instruction required in the public schools, and over 90% of those answer that question

affirmatively. Ten percent of respondents are not asked about hours or schedules.

What form of assessment do you provide and how many times a year?

- Slightly more than half of respondents write a progress report. About 16% of the people who write progress reports indicated that the schools expected 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 is nice to have as a record for your own use, there is no need to give that much information to school officials.
- Fourteen percent of respondents choose to test. Tests used include the California Achievement Test (CAT), the Personalized Achievement Summary System Test (PASS), the Wide Range Assessment test (WRAT), the Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, and the Stanford Test.
- Twelve percent of respondents submit work samples.
- Eleven percent of respondents submit no evaluation at all.
- Eight percent of respondents indicated their evaluation method varies; parents choose from year to year.
- Three percent of respondents indicated use of a form of evaluation other than testing, progress reports, or work samples.

Eighty-three percent of homeschoolers who indicated frequency submit evaluation once a year, 14% submit twice a year, 3% submit more than twice a year. This shows a trend toward less frequent reporting overall.

Do school officials provide you with a letter of approval?

Eighty-one percent of respondents receive an approval letter. Three percent get a letter if they ask for it. Seventeen percent do not receive a letter and don't ask for one.

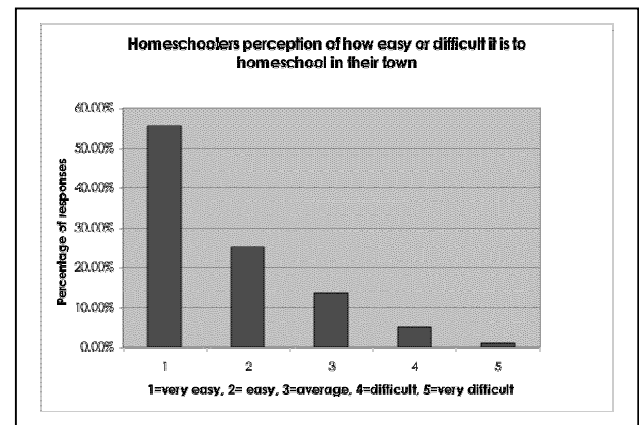
Do school officials allow homeschoolers to participate in school activities? Please be specific.

Eighty-eight percent of respondents report that their school allows them to participate in classes, sports, extracurricular activities, or some combination of these. Twelve percent report that their school does not allow them to participate in school functions at all. This represents an increase in the percentage of schools

allowing homeschoolers to participate in some or all of the listed activities.

"On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being very easy to deal with and 5 being very difficult, how would you rate your town's treatment of homeschoolers?"

Eighty-one percent of respondents reported their town to be easy or very easy to deal with (slightly up for the second year in a row), 13% reported their town to be average, 5% reported their town to be difficult, and less than one percent of respondents considered their town to be very difficult to deal with. Some towns that homeschoolers rate as friendly include Cambridge, Melrose, New Bedford, and Woburn.



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. Questions? Call AHM. <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.ahem.info/index.htm>.

H. R. 1815, The National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006

We are sorry to report that on January 3, 2006, H.R. 1815 was presented to the President. Once signed into law, the Secretary of Defense will decide what criteria will determine who is a graduate of homeschooling, for the purposes of recruiting and enlisting in the U. S. Armed Forces.

Here is the final language that was adopted:

SEC. 591. RECRUITMENT AND ENLISTMENT OF HOME-SCHOOLED STUDENTS IN THE ARMED FORCES.

(a) Policy on Recruitment and Enlistment.—

(1) POLICY REQUIRED.—The Secretary of Defense shall prescribe a policy on the recruitment and enlistment of home-schooled students in the Armed Forces.

(2) UNIFORMITY ACROSS THE ARMED FORCES.—The Secretary shall ensure that the policy prescribed under paragraph (1) applies, to the extent practicable, uniformly across the Armed Forces.

(b) Elements.—The policy under subsection (a) shall include the following:

(1) An identification of a graduate of home schooling for purposes of recruitment and enlistment in the Armed Forces that is in accordance with the requirements described in subsection (c).

(2) A communication plan to ensure that the policy described in subsection (c) is understood by recruiting officials of all the Armed Forces, to include field recruiters at the lowest level of command.

(3) An exemption of graduates of home schooling from the requirement for a secondary school diploma or an equivalent (GED) as a precondition for enlistment in the Armed Forces.

(c) Home School Graduates.—In prescribing the policy under subsection (a), the Secretary of Defense shall prescribe a single set of criteria to be used by the Armed Forces in determining whether an individual is a graduate of home schooling. The Secretary concerned shall ensure compliance with education credential coding requirements.

(d) Secretary Concerned Defined.—In this section, the term “Secretary concerned” has the meaning given such term in section 101(a)(9) of title 10, United States Code.

Background:

In May of 2005, the 739-page bill passed out of the house by the Yeas 390 and Nays 39. Senator Warner added this amendment regarding the “Recruitment and Enlistment of Home Schooled Students in the Armed Forces” on behalf of Senator Rick Santorum on November 9, 2005.

AHEM's questions and concerns are:

- As always, the term “home school” should not be used in federal law. See our position in “Other Current Federal Legislation,” p. 5..

- What might be the ramifications of the Secretary of Defense defining who qualifies as a homeschool graduate? While the bill requires this definition for the purpose of enlisting in the armed forces, will the definition come to be used in other ways to decide what constitutes a homeschool graduate?
- In practical terms, how will homeschooled graduates be “identified”? Will national registration of homeschooled students become necessary?

For more information

For further information about HR 1815 and explanations about why the federalization of home education is not desirable:

- Home Education Magazine News and Commentary <http://www.homeedmag.com/blogs/groupnews/>.
- <http://hr3753.blogspot.com/>, an online source of information for people working to kill the bills [HR 3753 / S 1691] — again — and keep homeschooling from being further defined by federal legislation.
- The Military Homeschooler http://home.kc.rr.com/milhmschlhq/homeschooling_federalization_of_homeschooling.htm has compiled a great deal of information on Homeschool NonDiscrimination Act 2005 (HR 3753 / SB 1691). At this site you will have access to the history behind this bill, why many home educators oppose it, and why HR 3753 / SB 1691 and the amendment in HR 1815 concerning home education is not needed and could harm homeschool freedoms.

Our thanks to Mary Nix of *Home Education Magazine* and to <http://hr3753.blogspot.com/> for contributing to information compiled here.

Other Current Federal Legislation

AHEM's position on federal homeschooling legislation

AHEM's philosophy is to strengthen the grassroots presence of homeschoolers, as our voices are strongest at the local and state level. It follows that it is wise to keep homeschooling out of federal law as much as possible to avoid further regulation and to keep the local, grassroots strength of homeschooling alive.

The following bills are currently in front of the 109th Congress. AHEM has heard many reasons to oppose them, including:

- Invites federal regulatory definitions of “homeschooling”
- Excluding homeschoolers from the provisions of one bill can be interpreted to mean that other bills which

do not explicitly exclude homeschoolers were meant to include them

- State level homeschool activism better serves efforts to maintain homeschooling freedoms
- Conflicts with state laws could lead to unwelcome changes at the state level

All bills listed mention “home school” in their text, inviting federal definition of the term:

- **Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act**, otherwise known as FERPA: H. R. 130. Introduced January 4, 2005 by Minnesota Congressman Mark Kennedy. Referred to the Subcommittee on Education Reform. *The Massachusetts Department of Education’s stringent regulations to protect the privacy of student records already include homeschoolers: “Student shall mean any person enrolled or formerly enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school or any person age three or older about whom a school committee maintains information.”* (603 C.M.R. 23, <http://www.doe.mass.edu/lawsregs/603cmr23.html>). *Other states could follow suit to protect students’ privacy, eradicating the need to insert the term “home school” into federal law.*
- **Family Education Freedom Act of 2005:** H.R. 406. Introduced by Texas Congressman Ron Paul on January 26, 2005. Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. *Allows IRS to define “home school” and raises questions about possible IRS definitions of “acceptable homeschooling expenses.”*
- **Hope Plus Scholarship Act of 2005:** H.R. 403. Introduced by Texas Congressman Ron Paul on January 26, 2005. Referred to the House Committee on Ways and Means. *Allows IRS to define “home school” and raises questions about possible IRS definitions of “acceptable homeschooling expenses.”*
- **Fed Up Higher Education Technical Amendments of 2005:** H.R. 508. Introduced by California Congressman Howard McKeon on February 2, 2005. Referred to the Subcommittee on 21st Century Competitiveness. *May require defining “home school.”*

The following bills, in addition to inviting federal definition of the term “home school,” also exclude homeschoolers from their provisions. Legally, this could be interpreted to mean that other bills in existence that do not exclude homeschoolers were meant to include them:

- **College Access and Opportunity Act of 2005:** H.R. 609. Introduced by Ohio Congressman John Boehner on February 8, 2005. Reported (Amended) by the Committee on Education and the Workforce; placed on the Union Calendar.
- **College Quality, Affordability, and Diversity Improvement Act of 2005:** S. 371. Introduced by Senator Edward Kennedy on February 14, 2005. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance.
- **Job Training Improvement Act of 2005:** H.R. 27. Introduced by California Congressman Howard McKeon on January 4, 2005. Received in the Senate and read twice and referred to the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions.
- **Lifetime of Education Opportunities Act of 2005:** S. 9. Introduced by Wyoming Senator Michael Enzi on January 24, 2005. Read twice and referred to the Committee on Finance.

- **Workforce Investment Act Amendments of 2005:** S.1021. Introduced by Wyoming Senator Michael Enzi on May 12, 2005. Placed on Senate Legislative Calendar under General Orders. Calendar No. 203.

Last but not least, HR 3753 / S 1691, “To amend selected statutes to clarify existing Federal law as to the treatment of students privately educated at home under State law” aka “The Homeschool Non-Discrimination Act of 2005”

HR 3753 / S 1691 was introduced in both the Senate and House of Representatives on September 13, 2005 and has been referred to various committees. Some of you will remember that an almost identical omnibus bill was introduced in 2003 with the backing of the Homeschool Legal Defense Association (see <http://www.ahem.info/ArchivesHR2732.htm>). At that time we opposed it for the reasons listed above. We were also concerned then, as we are now, about whether homeschoolers wish to let a national organization such as HSLDA speak for them. If Representatives and Senators do not hear from individual homeschoolers about this bill, they may interpret HSLDA’s voice to be the national voice for homeschoolers. Therefore, we recommend that individuals research the bill and respond to their representatives as individual constituents.

HR 3753 / S 1691’s Section 10 **“Recruitment and Enlistment of Home-schooled students in the Armed Forces”** is particularly disturbing. From Section 10:

“(c) Qualified Home- School Graduates- In identifying a graduate of home schooling for purposes of subsection (b), the Secretary concerned shall ensure that the graduate meets each of the following requirements: ...”
Valerie Moon of *The Military Homeschooler* (<http://home.kc.rr.com/milhmschlhq/index.html>) observes, “...this portion of the bill has the potential to leak over (via precedent) into other federal legislation — because it defines what is an acceptable homeschool graduation for enlistment purposes. How long before what’s sauce for the military is sauce for federal loan money for college? After all, a standard will have been defined, and that standard is recognizable to the bulk of US citizens, because it’s what they’ve already got.”

And what requirements, you might ask, does the bill set out for identifying homeschoolers? One of the five requirements for identifying a graduate of home schooling is:

“(5) The graduate has provided the Secretary concerned with a third-party verification letter of the graduate’s home-school status by the Home School Legal Defense

Association or a State or county home-school association or organization.”

HR 3753 / S 1691 has all the problems of the other federal bills, and then some!

While this bill languishes in committees, the gist of Section 10 has been added to H.R. 1815 as Section 591, which passed the House and Senate in December 2005. See article above for details.

Bill Information

To access the full text, summary, status, sponsor, and cosponsors of any of these bills, go to <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and use the bill number in the search utility.

To Contact Your Legislators:

Contact members of committees that are reviewing the bills, and your own legislator if he or she is a sponsor of the bill. If you plan to write to Congressional legislators, don't use snail mail. Congressional paper mail is still being screened for anthrax and other biological agents, so an email or a fax will get through much faster. Phone calls are another way to bypass the long screening time for paper mail. (Tip from <http://hr3753.blogspot.com/>).

Find contact information as well as listings of who is on what committee at the following sites:

- Members of the US House of Representatives <http://www.house.gov/>
- Members of the US Senate <http://www.senate.gov/>
- House committees <http://www.house.gov/house/CommitteeWWW.shtml>
- Senate committees http://www.senate.gov/pagelayout/committees/b_three_sections_with_tasers/membership.htm

Meet Massachusetts Homeschoolers . . .

The Scheduled Spontaneous Morning

by Rachael Barlow

(First published in the Groton Landmark; reprinted with permission.)

Everyone had eaten breakfast and was upstairs getting ready for the day. This, like most of our days, had been planned in half hour chunks by our eight-year-old. We were in a particular hurry because we realized we didn't have a present for a special birthday party that morning. So our usual karate class for the five-year-old/kickboxing for the not-five-year-old me were cancelled. (I really hate to miss kickboxing.)

Luckily, we were at least all dressed when they spotted the Great Blue Heron out our front window. My oldest sent my youngest running to find me, while she kept an eye on it. We all rushed to get socks and shoes on and we burst outside. (Schedule, what schedule?) While we ran down our hill to the pond where my oldest thought the heron had landed, we ran into a new neighbor who clearly wondered why an eight-year-old was running down a hill at 8:30 in the morning instead of being on the school bus. I mentioned we had seen the heron and she pointed out that this must be our science. (Whew! One thing to check off — it's not Mendeleyev's periodic table but it'll do.) We went blindly running down the conservation trail next to the pond, with my oldest and me in the lead. My youngest started yelling that we had to come back. She had discovered a dead mole just lying in the middle of the path. (Did we really run right over a dead rodent?!) Both children wanted to determine how it had died but we couldn't find a mark on the thing. They took turns using a stick to stroke the animal and finally tried to pry its mouth open or locate its eyes. (Do moles have eyes? This one seemed to have none. Something to look up later.) My eight-year-old explained to the five-year-old that since moles live mostly underground, their snout and mouth are shaped especially to avoid shoveling dirt, while their front paws and claws are designed exactly for shoveling dirt.

Oh, where was that heron? We finally finished (thank God!) examining the dead mole and I snuck (OK I completely ran) around the bend only to see the beautiful bird fly off. I apologized for ruining the search with my lack of sneakiness (we had just done the Museum of Science exhibit on sneakiness for seeing birds the week before, so they knew all about that). Both girls assured me they were not disappointed, they got to see the heron and could they look at the mole some more? They had become convinced that the animal had died of rabies, since the neighbor had a rabid raccoon in her garage and the mole had no marks on it. So we went back to the mole for more aggressive prodding. (Thank goodness it was already dead.)

Afterwards, we headed back to the house so we could get dressed for our exercise time. (If this was science, then I couldn't count it as phys. ed., now could I?) On the way, my eight-year-old called to me (somehow I guess I'm always ahead of them — I can't imagine why), wanting me to look at something — the organs of some animal. More prodding with a stick and they determined that a bird didn't like intestines or liver and must have spit them out. “Mommy, why aren't the intestines bloody?” It wasn't until over dinner that

Daddy explained that it must have been fish guts that a fisherman cut out. Thankfully, we had finished eating.

So the amazing thing was that this adventure took up two blocks of science, everyone had fun, we found the perfect gift at a store right in town and we made it, in tea party dresses, to the birthday party on time. (No, even though it was a bunch of homeschoolers we didn't bring the dead mole to the tea party but I thought about it.)

Rachael spent ten years as a software engineer, became a mother, was a volunteer lactation specialist, and now homeschools her two children, helps direct a homeschoolers' chorus, and worship leads in her local church. When her local paper, the Groton Landmark, included homeschoolers in their back-to-school issue, Rachael was interviewed but felt that she didn't get to say enough. The editor then told her she could continue to share her opinions by writing a weekly article about homeschooling. She jumped at the chance and found a new voice — writing. You can read more of Rachael's thoughts at her blog <http://rsbarlow.blogspot.com/>.

Around AHEM . . .

A Look Back at 2005

Highlights of 2005

A trip down memory lane, or an opportunity to catch up on events and info you may have missed the first time around:

In 2005, we enjoyed connecting with a cross section of Massachusetts homeschoolers in a variety of ways:

- Home Education Day at the State House in April, including a family contra dance and side trips to The Concord Museum, the National Heritage Museum, and the Paul Revere House.
- Field trips to
 - the DeCordova Museum in January
 - the New Bedford Whaling Museum in March
 - the Museum of Science in Boston in May and October
 - the Wellfleet Audubon Sanctuary in September, and
 - Hancock Shaker Village in September

Throughout the year, we reported on a variety of issues important to Massachusetts homeschoolers:

- National Merit® Scholarship Program
- Handling It Ourselves
- Privacy, the Military, and Your Education Plan
- Legislation



Massachusetts homeschoolers gather in the Great Hall of the State House, April, 2005

We were pleased to be able to offer:

- New web pages on
 - Making the Decision and Getting Started Homeschooling: A Walkthrough
 - Recommended Books, including books about homeschooling and books featuring homeschoolers
 - Beyond Homeschooling: College, Alternatives to College, Grown up Homeschoolers
 - Libraries and Homeschoolers: Especially for Librarians
- AHEM membership cards
- AHEM trifold, with info on homeschooling in Massachusetts — perfect for handing out at gatherings or leaving at your local library
- Not-Back-to-School events listing

We were pleased to be able to announce:

- 501(c)(3) Charitable Status Approved
- Virtual Volunteering Opportunities at AHEM

Ongoing efforts include:

- Legislative watch
- The Library Mailing Project, mailing brochures with info on homeschooling in MA along with an easy way for them to reorder, to 350+ Massachusetts libraries
- Policy & Practice Database about homeschooling in Massachusetts
- Communicating with our Friends (find archived newsletters at <http://www.ahem.info/Newsletters.htm>)
- Support group listings (36 statewide now listed; do you know of any in Nantucket or Dukes counties?)
- Events page
- County Contacts, available for phone or email help anytime.

Thank you

As we bid goodbye to 2005, we want to be sure to thank all of you for your support over the past year, whether it came in the form of reading our emails or newsletter, filling out the questionnaire, joining us on a field trip, attending Home Education Day at the State House, handing out a trifold brochure, accessing Amazon.com through AHEM, or sending us a cash donation. Any level of interest and participation is greatly appreciated and is what fuels our efforts.

We look forward to meeting more of you in 2006, and continuing to grow the number of informed and active homeschoolers in Massachusetts. We always appreciate feedback on how we are doing and ideas about how we can serve you better.

Looking ahead to 2006

- AHEM as featured speaker at South Shore Home Learners January meeting
- AHEM fundraiser in May
- State House visits and field trips to Peabody Essex Museum, Black Heritage Trail, and more

Peabody Essex Museum

<http://www.pem.org/flash.php>

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts is planning an hour-long tour of *The Artful Teapot* exhibit on **Friday, March 3rd, 2006** at the **Peabody Essex Museum**, East India Square, Salem, MA. We will meet in the main lobby at 10:15 AM.

The Artful Teapot: 20th-Century Expressions from the Kamm Collection is a fascinating look at how a single object — the teapot — has served as a creative vehicle for artists around the world. The 250 teapots in the Peabody Essex Museum exhibition include teapots by painter Roy Lichtenstein, sculptors Arman and Michael Lucero, and ceramists Betty Woodman and Adrian Saxe, as well as works by more than 100 other artists. Organized thematically, this highly original exhibition demonstrates how the teapot can be provocative, playful, and profound as well as conventional. Addressing aesthetic, social, and political issues, *The Artful Teapot* examines the teapot's ability to be more than just a device to serve tea.

Cost: \$5.00 per student, \$5.00 per adult. After the tour you will be free to explore the Museum on your own. **However, the Chinese House will NOT be available.**

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

- your name
- the number of children and adults,
- ages of children,
- your address,
- and email or phone number.

Those with email will receive confirmation about a week before the visit.

Space is limited; checks must be postmarked by February 10th. **No refunds after February 10th.** Email FieldTrips@AHEM.info for more information or call 781-641-0566.

Directions:

Located sixteen miles north of Boston, the museum is easily accessible in the heart of historic Salem, Massachusetts.

By car, take Route 128 North to exit 25A. Follow route 114 East into Salem. In Salem, follow signs for the museum and downtown parking. Note: I-95 and Route 128 North share the same loop around Boston. **When the roads divide, stay on Route 128 North.**

By train, take the MBTA Commuter Rail (Newburyport/Rockport line) from Boston's North Station or other points. The museum is a five-minute walk from the Salem station. Follow signs for downtown.

Parking:

In Salem, follow the signs for downtown parking. The museum is a short walk from several municipal lots. The largest parking garage is at the corner of Hawthorne Boulevard and Derby Street, three blocks from the museum. A smaller garage is on New Liberty Street, and a municipal lot is on Church Street, behind East India Mall. Limited on street parking is available around Salem Common and at two-hour meters.

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

Spend a Spring Day in the City State House Visit

One of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts's organizational goals is to encourage self-advocacy and legislative awareness. Cultivating relationships at the State House is a key component to achieving this goal. In developing these relationships, we will have a base of state legislators to work with in the event of a legislative challenge to homeschooling. To this end, AHEM sponsors periodic State House field trips throughout the year. During a typical visit, the

group tours the State House with a guide who details the historical significance of the building. An important element of these visits is a group meeting with a state senator or representative. For representative government to work, we need active participants. We strongly encourage families to participate in these events.

Advocates for Home Education will sponsor a State House visit on Thursday, April 27th, at 11:00 AM. Children are welcome. Our tour will begin promptly at 11:00 AM, so please plan to meet in Doric Hall (2nd floor) at 10:45 AM. If there is a legislative session going on that day, we will be able to sit in for part of the session.

Participants are encouraged to contact your own senator or representative and let them know you will be visiting the State House on April 27th. Your legislator will arrange to come down and meet with your family. They are always very enthusiastic about meeting constituents. Visit www.ahem.info/ContactInfoforFedStateLocalReps.htm for contact info for your representative.

Make a day of it by walking the Black Heritage Trail in the afternoon. Sign up info for either or both tours follows.

Black Heritage Trail®

<http://www.afroammuseum.org/trail.htm>

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts is planning a guided tour of the Black Heritage Trail® on **Thursday, April 27th, 2006 at 2:00 PM.**

The Black Heritage Trail® is a walking tour that explores the history of Boston's 19th century African American community. The tour encompasses the largest collection of historic sites in the country relating to the life of a free African American community prior to the Civil War.

Make a day of it by visiting the State House with AHM in the morning (see above), picnicking in the Public Gardens or having lunch in a local restaurant, and then spending the afternoon walking The Trail in the company of other Massachusetts homeschoolers.

We will meet the Ranger at the Robert Gould Shaw Memorial on Beacon Street directly across from the Massachusetts State House at 1:45 PM. Please dress appropriately for the weather, and make all necessary personal preparations prior to the start of the 1.6 mile walking tour. Also, please be sure to bring water with you for the beginning of the tour.

If you want to go to the State House and/or the Black Heritage Trail: Space is limited. Please RSVP to

FieldTrips@AHM.info or call Cheryl at 978-532-5778 to sign up. Please include:

- your name,
- the number of children and adults,
- the ages of children,
- the program(s) you are signing up for
- your address, and
- email or phone number.

Directions:

Find directions to the State House at <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.

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. For directions to the garage, see http://www.mccahome.com/Garage/commons_garage_directions.html.

We Need You!

We know that many issues and causes, including the most fundamental — homeschooling your children — demand your attention every day. So it is with humbleness that we ask you to take another minute out of your day to consider how you might be able to help AHM.

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. (AHM) 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. AHM is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

Ways you can help

Save the date

Save the date for Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts's spring fundraiser, a social evening of food, drink, and connection on **Saturday, May 6, 2006.**

AHM is currently seeking **donations** for a silent auction to be held at the event. Please let us know if you have a **skill** or **item** you would be willing to donate. Examples are:

- Health/beauty/self-improvement services such as massage therapy, acupuncture, facials, yoga classes, nutritional consultations, or beauty and health care items;
- House and garden services such as painting, landscaping, gardening, decluttering, cleaning as well as plants, tools, and products;
- Food related items including meals you would provide, a basket of goodies, or gift certificates to restaurants or food stores;
- Family related items such as birthday party performances, family outings, museum memberships, tickets to cultural events and performances;
- Educational items such as gift certificates for lessons, classes, or tutoring;
- Professional services such as computer repair and consultation, legal services, career consulting;
- CDs, books, musical instruments, craft kits or items, toys, gift certificates to stores;
- And anything else you can think of!

Please contact us with donation offers and ideas about how we can make this event a success (info@ahem.info or 781-641-0566). Let us know if you're interested in helping out with planning the event. All proceeds will go to AHEM's grassroots homeschooling activism.

Shop at Amazon.com

You can also support AHEM when you shop at Amazon.com by entering the Amazon web site via <http://www.ahem.info/>. AHEM will earn referral fees on your Amazon purchases.

Write a check

Please consider AHEM when you decide which charities to support with your hard-earned money. We depend on your help: Like every other nonprofit organization, we have costs which include maintaining our website, our PO box, photocopying, postage, special projects, etc. We understand that you want as much of your donation as possible to go towards the mission of Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. All of our workers are volunteers who donate their time and energy and do so without compensation. When we do spend money, we do our best to make sure that we have found the most efficient and effective option that uses the least amount of resources. Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All donations are tax deductible to the full extent of the law.

How to Donate

Please make out your checks to "Advocates for Home

Education in Massachusetts, Inc." and send them to the following address:

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc.
PO Box 1307
Arlington, MA 02474

Thank you!

Giving Thanks

We want to publicly recognize the wonderful people who have volunteered their time and talents to AHEM over the past year. We rely on volunteers, both on site and online, to support homeschooling in Massachusetts.

Part of our work this year has been to organize and keep better account of our work with volunteers. If you have helped out, and aren't represented on the list below, please let us know! More info about volunteering for AHEM can be found at <http://www.ahem.info/VirtualVolunteers.htm>.

We are very grateful that the following people have considered AHEM a worthy cause to which to contribute some of their valuable time. Their very offer to help strengthens the foundation of the organization, but what they give doesn't stop there. In addition to the specific tasks they have taken on, they have been generous with their ideas about AHEM's mission and work:

Amy D.

- Field trip planning

Annette D.

- Policy and Practice Database entry

Deb B.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee

Dominique A.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 speaker
- Newsletter article

Eileen R.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee
- AHEM tote bag creation

Eli G.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee
- Newsletter article

Giles H.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 speaker
- AHEM tote bag design and creation

Ingrid R.

- Library Outreach Project mailing labels
- Web site proofreading

Janet H.

- Database creation

Liz S.

- Computer and web site consultation

Mary L.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee

Molly P.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 speaker

Morgan H.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee

Nadia S.

- Newsletter mailings

Peter B.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 speaker

Rebecca B.

- Shared wisdom re: navigating legislative and court issues

Rick S.

- Web site consultation
- Database consultation

Roberta A.

- Home Education Day at the State House 2005 committee
- Fund raising support

Suzanne M.

- County Contact
- Library Outreach Project mailing labels
- Newsletter article

We can't thank you enough.

Sincerely,
AHem Board of Directors

Become a Friend of AHem

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts (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.

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.

Advocates for Home Education in Massachusetts, Inc. is a 501(c)(3) charitable organization. All donations are tax deductible.

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.

If you don't wish to receive this newsletter anymore, 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.

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!

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