

Meeting of the Home Education Advisory Council
September 26, 2019
Department of Education, Concord, NH

Chairperson Kitty Michelotti called the meeting to order at 3:32 p.m.

Members present: Kitty Michelotti, George D’Orazio, Rep. Glenn Cordelli, Michael Koski, Michelle Levell, Stefanie Marsh, Jennifer Pereira, Sen. Ruth Ward, Fred Fraser (arrived late). Visitors: Donna Wedge and Melissa Robb from EnrichRI, a Rhode Island statewide homeschool support group; Megan George.

The **Minutes** of the meeting May 23, 2019 were accepted.

Chairperson’s Report

Kitty reported that the Annual Report to the Board of Education went well.

Expiring terms: The terms of some of the home educator representatives have gotten mis-aligned. The Commissioner will extend terms of some members to stagger them properly. Cara Potter would like to stay on, perhaps as a representative from libraries. Helen Rist will stay on until a new representative is found from the NH School Administrators.

VLACS: Students have been required to successfully complete VLACS coursework (8 weeks) before enrolling full-time. This obligates parents to put a home education program into place during that time. The policy was in place because students would drop out. VLACS will accept students directly who have had some successful previous experience with a VLACS course, and have changed the “trial period” to four weeks before students can enroll full-time. Michelle asked, what if student has other online experience with accredited school. Stef thought most people asking are wanting to go straight from public school to free VLACS, but didn’t think sending a Letter of Intent was too difficult. George will look into setting up a committee/talking with VLACS people about finding a solution. Jen suggested, ask parents who are currently using VLACS to comment.

Rules update: Attorney Sala, who was working with us on the rules, has left DOE. Attorney Amanda Phelps is working on them now and has amended them. Amanda has volunteered that she does not understand all the details of home education law and she made changes in accordance with the NH drafting and procedure manual for rules. George would like to call her and discuss the changes first. The rules committee will reconvene to discuss the changes before the November HEAC meeting.

Equal access issues: Kitty spoke with the Commissioner. He has decided the best approach would be a technical advisory to remind districts of the equal access law <http://www.gencourt.state.nh.us/rsa/html/XV/193/193-1-c.htm>, which allows homeschoolers to participate in classes and activities, “curricular courses and cocurricular programs,” at their local public school and pointing out that homeschoolers cannot have any more restrictive access to curricular and cocurricular events than public school students. He is waiting to get input from Amanda. Michelle pointed out that the issue is between areas that say “shall” and say “may.” Need to point out that social engagement is included, such as end of year field trips, school dances.

Mike commented that schools try to limit attendance because they need to keep control of the activity and people who are within the building. Some field trips are open and some are tightly aligned with curriculum. For example, the French trip isn't open to the Spanish students, so the school does have some say in who gets to attend. Requirements for attendance can't be more restrictive for homeschoolers, but if there was a restriction for students at the school it might apply to homeschoolers too. Parents could call and ask. Some events, some proms for example, are only for students in that district. Homeschoolers could show proof that they live in that district. There may be signups ahead of time and that would help the chaperones/teachers know who would be there. Schools need emergency contact info, to know if district insurance would apply, etc. If the activity is curriculum based—what the objectives of the trip are, is everyone attending ready to learn those things?

Michelle reported that a family had been told that if their students attended a dance they would be kicked out of the sports program. Glenn said it would be interesting to see if districts react to the advisory. Mike suggested this should be talked about with the Superintendents' Association. Kitty will talk with Helen about what they need from homeschoolers. It would also be valuable to talk with the School Boards Assn., since they have not sent a representative to HEAC.

Reports from Board Members:

Stef Marsh, New Hampshire Homeschooling Coalition--parents dealing with DCYF, NHHC board members trying to work as liaisons to explain homeschooling to social workers.

Jen Pereira, Catholics United for Home Education--seeing lots of growth

Mike Koski, New Hampshire Association of School Principals--it's a busy time of year

Michelle Levell for Granite State Home Educators--had more than 200 attend the 3rd Annual Not-back-school Picnic at Livingston Park in Manchester. Businesses and organizations donated prizes. Latitude learning has started in Manchester and is having a used curriculum sale. School choice for NH is having an info night with NHTI for college pathways Oct 15, with NHHEAF on financial aid and scholarships, and another one with college admissions staff.

Senator Ward--Budget was passed to support public schools. She often points out need for school choice, but meets opposition from many other legislators. Would like to see some state aid go to homeschoolers.

Rep. Cordelli--a municipality can provide funds for curriculum and books to outside public school. Hampton gives to local Catholic school and has been doing it for 30 years. Reminded us of the Modern States program, courses matched to CLEP tests. If you take their courses, they will pay for the CLEP exam. Filing period for bills for the NH House just ended. Nothing on home education. Senate filing period is starting now.

Fred Fraser, Dept. of Education, higher education--homeschoolers doing well at Thomas More College

Commissioner's Report

The Commissioner was not present but let us know—the Deputy Secretary of Education Mick Zais is coming to NHTI on Monday, September 30, 5:00 PM – 6:00 PM, for a public forum on the State of Our Schools.

Homeschoolers are encouraged to nominate one male and one female for the US Presidential Scholars program. It is available to all high-school seniors, including home educated students. Students should be outstanding in either academic accomplishments, in the arts, or in career or technical education. Nominations are due by November 5. <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/psp/about.html>

Old Business

Annual Report: Kitty explained that in the final report, the section on missing years of HEAC annual reports could be deleted. Reports are now on file. Voted to send final report with that change to Board of Ed. Motion-- Michelle. Seconded-- Fred. Motion Passed.

New Business

Election of Officers

Kitty Michelotti was nominated for Chair by George. Seconded by Michelle. Voted to elect Kitty.

George D’Orazio was nominated for Vice-chair by Kitty. Seconded by Fred. Voted to elect George.

Cara Potter was nominated for Secretary by Kitty. Seconded by George. Voted to elect Cara. Kitty will let Cara know that she’s been volunpicked.

Kitty asked HEAC members if it’s okay if we add their emails to newsletter mailings from NHHHC, GSHE, etc.

Public Comment

Donna Wedge and Melissa Robb from EnrichRI, the largest secular support group in Rhode Island. Before the meeting they spoke with Kitty, George, and Michelle about the history of the group. They wanted to learn about the Council in case such a thing was needed in RI. Glenn pointed out that HEAC was written into the original law. Kitty pointed out value of learning about the different perspectives on home education. Rhode Island home education law is stricter than New Hampshire’s, but they have the same district by district differences. The number of homeschoolers in Rhode Island is growing. Growth in preschool is large because of pressure on parents to put their children in a program at age 3. Another area of increase is pull-outs from high school. These families are difficult populations to help, not “natural” homeschoolers; they simply want their children to graduate. Bullying and anxiety (among straight A students) are major issues.

Recap: George will be calling VLACS. Kitty will call Superintendents Assn and School Boards Association and touch base with the Commissioner about the technical advisory.

Next meeting

November 21, 3:30. 3rd Thursday, not fourth. Also note that the December place-holder meeting is moved to Dec 19 (3rd Thurs.)

Michelle made the motion to adjourn. Glenn seconded. Meeting adjourned at 4:36.

Minutes recorded by Stefanie Marsh