

HEAC Annual Report  
2019 - 2020  
Chairman Kathryn Michelotti

The Home Education Advisory Council met this year in September, December, January, April, May, and June.

We hit the ground running in September with a successful change to the VLACS rules regarding new students and homeschooling. Previously, VLACS had asked students who wanted to be full-time VLACS, to register as homeschoolers while they tried the VLACS program part-time for 8 weeks. While this satisfied truancy laws, it put an extra burden on parents to meet homeschooling laws, including maintaining a portfolio and reading list. It also added confusion as to how testing or evaluation should be conducted at the end of the year. Thanks to the combined efforts of HEAC, the Commissioner, and VLACS, students with some VLACS experience will be immediately accepted as full-time and the trial period for new students has been cut in half to 4 weeks. While the intent to homeschool must still be filed for truancy compliance, we are encouraged that this too can change in the future as education continues to evolve.

We were joined in our September meeting by members of the public from Rhode Island; Melissa Robb and Donna Wedge. These women were from ENRICHri, Rhode Island's Largest Secular Homeschool Support Group. They were curious to learn more about HEAC; how it was formed and how we accomplish our mission, in the hopes to create their own version in Rhode Island. It was an honor to be reminded how unique New Hampshire is in its educational advisory community and the connections that have been formed because of it.

The HEAC Rules Committee was introduced to the new Department of Education Lawyer, Christopher Bond, and the Rules Coordinator, Amanda Phelps; and began to review the rules anew with collaboration and fresh eyes. It is an ongoing process to maintain the freedoms for homeschoolers while following the letter if not spirit, of the law. We have discussed many details in depth and have voted to send our recommendation along to the next step of the process.

Some notable successes in encouraging communication and understanding between school districts and homeschoolers were facilitated by Technical Advisories sent out by Commissioner Edelblut and the Department of Education. Many homeschoolers enjoy participating in curricular and co-curricular activities offered by their local school districts. From individual classes, to field trips, and sports teams, homeschool students benefit from the variety that is available. Some school districts are not familiar with the participation laws, or are unclear on what the requirements are for homeschoolers, this is understandable considering how many students they are already in charge of. Technical Advisories help to bridge the gap between access for homeschoolers and participation requirements for schools. We have also seen technical advisories help school districts understand what information they do and do not need to keep on file regarding the homeschoolers in their districts.

HEAC had some changes in membership this year. Cara Potter from Unschooling NH resigned at the end of her term. We are awaiting another nomination from Unschooling NH. Catie

McLaughlin replaced Michelle Levell for the Seacoast Christian Home Educators Association. Jennifer Pereira has agreed to represent Catholics United for Home Education for another term, and Fred Fraser from Thomas Moore College was voted to be our Secretary during our first online meeting in April.

This year we saw a surge in homeschool activities. New coops and learning centers took shape offering bi-weekly classes and social opportunities. Dances, sports, talent shows, hiking clubs, Model UN teams, Dungeons and Dragons campaigns, and homeschool 4-H clubs saw increases in attendance. There were art shows, curriculum sales, several dances and proms, worlds fairs and science fairs, and graduations all planned for this spring before the education world was turned on its head.

When I wrote in last year's report; "HEAC's role as liaison is growing and changing along with the educational options in New Hampshire. As homeschooling gains in popularity, and alternative schooling choices become more customizable, there is a communication gap to be bridged between representatives of all forms of education." I had no idea how prophetic it would become. HEAC, with its knowledgeable members from all walks of education, has helped those who are now crisis schooling, to find resources and support.

We joked about all being homeschoolers in March, but quickly realized that all students, from the university level down to pre-school were learning in crisis-mode. Without access to field trips, libraries, classrooms, therapists, peers, and educators, all of New Hampshire's student population have been crisis schooling for this spring-term. While we are all trying our best to learn in our houses, we are not homeschooling. Homeschooling involves attending coops, taking enrichment classes, participating in curricular and co-curricular clubs, showcasing talent and knowledge to the community through shows, performances, and fairs, and being with our friends on a daily basis. Homeschoolers are crisis-schooling too. While this delineation is important from an administrative and legislative point of view, it makes no difference to the students themselves. All that New Hampshire's students know is that this is unfamiliar, and they are looking to us all for guidance.

Silver linings have buffered this time of crisis schooling. Homeschool parents have reached out to public school parents, curriculum companies have made resources free, experts are sharing their knowledge online, art lessons are given by famous illustrators over lunch, school busses as wireless access points are deployed to neighborhoods. Creativity and problem solving have become part of the routine for everyone from the Department of Education to the parents at the kitchen table. Crisis schooling has also highlighted the gaps in education and services, and those parents whose children feel lost, have reached out to HEAC.

We have much to look forward to this coming year. I am privileged to serve in the instruction workgroup of the School Transition Reopening and Redesign Taskforce (STRRT) task force. Our first meeting alone was filled with novel ideas from all perspectives of education. Educators, like the children they instruct, are filled with creativity and will find a way to continue education in New Hampshire in a way that's best for all involved. I'm excited to be a part of education in New Hampshire, surrounded by brilliant educators on HEAC, STRRT, at the state -level, and in my daily life.

## Establishment of HEAC

RSA 193-A, enacted in 1990, established home education as an alternative to compulsory attendance at school.

*The general court recognizes, in the enactment of RSA 193-A as inserted by section 3 of this act, that it is the primary right and obligation of a parent to choose the appropriate educational alternative for a child under his care and supervision, as provided by law. One such alternative allows a parent to elect to educate a child at home as an alternative to attendance at a public or private school, in accordance with RSA 193-A. The general court further recognizes that home education is more individualized than instruction normally provided in the classroom setting.*

The statute also created the home education advisory council (HEAC). Its membership consists of six persons nominated by New Hampshire home educator associations, two persons nominated by the New Hampshire department of education, one person nominated by each of the following associations: the NH School Administrators Association, the New Hampshire School Boards Association, the New Hampshire School Principals Association, the nonpublic school advisory council, and three members of the New Hampshire Legislature: a Senator, and two members of the House of representatives. The chair of the council is elected from among the home educator members. A list of the members of the Council is attached.

The Council was modeled, in part, after the nonpublic school advisory council to provide a forum for the exchange of ideas and concerns of educators/administrators and homeschooling parents.

The duties of the Council, as prescribed in ED 315.10, are as follows:

- (a) The home education advisory council shall carry out those duties assigned to it by the commissioner. The council shall work with home educators and representatives of private and public education to encourage an understanding of home education.*
- (b) Assigned areas of responsibility for the council shall include the following:*
  - (1) Developing and maintaining effective communications between home educators and those public, and nonpublic schools and state and local agencies involved in home education;*
  - (2) Recommending to the commissioner and state board of education desired changes in rules pertaining to home education;*
  - (3) Establishing a grievance committee to hear grievances referred to it by the commissioner; and*
  - (4) Providing an annual report to the state board on its activities.*