

NH Home Education Advisory Council (HEAC)

Draft Minutes of May 17, 2024 Meeting

Granite State College, 25 Hall St., Concord, NH

In physical attendance: April Villani, Tim Carney, Dianne Nolin, Sen. Ruth Ward, Rebekah Woodman

In remote attendance: Jill Grant (alone in room, professional obligations), Althea Barton (alone in room, family obligations)

Meeting called to order at 2:35pm by Chair.

Agenda review: Chair reviewed. No changes.

Minutes: Chair suggested a minor revision. Ms. Nolin motioned to approve; Ms. Woodman seconded. Roll call: Villani yes, Nolin yes, Woodman yes, Grant yes. Barton abstained due to absence from that meeting.

Public comments: None; no members of public attending.

Immediate business

A. 2023-2024 Annual Report

Ms. Villani read the draft report for the record. Ms. Woodman asked about assessing proposed legislation. Ms. Villani clarified that the Council discusses but doesn't take action or testify on legislation. Mr. Carney clarified that p. 3 item 4 should read, "including a participating nonpublic school." Ms. Barton noted that, though efforts have been made to clarify the differences between RSA 193-A and 194-F on the NHED website, further clarification is needed; she suggested changing the report language to reflect that. Other revisions were suggested and accepted, including clarifying that the GED is also available in addition to the HiSET, and correction of typos and legal references.

Members discussed changes to the section titled "Mass Confusion: 193-A vs. 194-F." Sen. Ward suggested deleting as unnecessary the paragraph listing the council's four clarifying recommendations. Ms. Villani noted that the council made the same recommendations in the 2021-2022 annual report. Ms. Barton suggested that the recommendations should stay in the report since they haven't been addressed yet. Members agreed to change the heading to "Widespread Confusion." Discussion ensued about the pros and cons of noting that Prenda's requirements do not align with RSA 193-A, including whether it's unnecessary or a chance to enlighten the NH Board of Education on this issue. Members expressed concern that Prenda, which is a microschool, could cause RSA 193-A to be diluted or changed in the future. Members agreed to delete the sentence and continue outreach on this issue.

Ms. Nolin motioned to approve the Annual Report with recommended changes; Ms. Woodman seconded. Roll call: Villani yes, Nolin yes, Woodman yes, Grant yes, Barton yes.

Mr. Carley noted the next step is the HEAC presentation to the NH BOE either June 13, July 11 or August 8. Ms. Villani will attend.

- B. 2024 Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). Members discussed recent issues with FAFSA.

Commissioner's report

Mr. Carney reported that his department hired a part time employee to help with home education notifications, calls, the webpage, and other duties. Over the summer he will contact various associations to try to fill the open positions on the council. Members who wish to be re-nominated are encouraged to contact Mr. Carney.

Ms. Grant stepped out at 3:39pm.

Mr. Carney noted that staff is still working with attorney Liz Brown on the rulemaking process with regard to ED300. He said Commissioner Edelblut is in favor of reviewing the rules and eliminating things that are not in the law.

Ms. Grant returned around 3:45pm.

Member reports

Sen. Ward reported on changes to the state special education advisory council, saying all the lobbyists had been removed and Rep. Kutab is working with parents. She asked what percentage of home educators use EFA funds, and whether they refuse funding because they don't want to be associated with the Childrens Scholarship Fund. Members said no one knows the percentage because the numbers are not tracked. Ms. Grant said at her private religious school about 50% use EFA funds, many for electives. Discussion ensued.

Ms. Nolin asked about the study committee process; Sen. Ward explained it.

4:01 Ms. Grant left the meeting for another obligation.

Ms. Barton said the NH Homeschooling Coalition is updating the legal pages of its website. NHHHC representatives sent Mr. Carney a list of clarifying questions including who has the legal right to see homeschooling portfolios and under what circumstances, how does an RSA 194-F student graduate, is RSA 194-F the only statute that applies to EFA homeschoolers, and other questions. Mr. Carney said he will respond next week.

Ms. Nolin said that Rep. Peternel changed the GOP platform to support homeschooling.

Ms. Villani noted this is a busy and exciting time of year for home educators.

Ms. Woodman said she talked with a homeschooling mom who is part of a small homeschool group. She said they discussed the difference between homeschooling under RSA 193-A and RSA 194-F and the mom reported being unaware of the difference for several years. Ms. Woodman noted students who are homeschooling under RSA 193-A have to terminate their home education program before enrolling in the EFA program, and within 15 days of termination, according to the RSA. She's concerned that many people have notified under RSA 193-A, accepted EFA funding, and not terminated under RSA 193-A. She said this and other important steps aren't clear on the NHED Home Education website or in the EFA handbook. She asked how we can clarify the situation.

Mr. Carney said there have been a lot of late terminations lately. Members asked if the Childrens Scholarship Fund could clarify it on their website. Mr. Carney said he would bring the issue to Brian Voelk, EFA administrator. Members wondered whether people might be double dipping, getting EFA funds and taking classes at public schools, for example. Mr. Carney noted some EFA recipients have inquired about getting access to public schools and he has to explain they gave up that right when they accepted EFA funds.

Sen. Ward left at 4:16pm.

Rulemaking/legislative updates

On April 12, 2022, HEAC recommended HEAC and NHED research waiving the requirement for the participating agency to sign off to allow 16 and 17 year old home educated students to take the HiSET (High School Equivalency Test). Rulemaking updates are still underway.

Members briefly discussed HB 1665, a partisan bill relative to student eligibility for education freedom accounts and the scholarship organization's costs of administering the program, extending phase-out grants for education freedom accounts, and revising the definitions of average daily membership in attendance and average daily membership in residence.

Around 4:30pm Ms. Villani asked for consensus to extend meeting time. All agreed.

Continuing business

Establishment of rules committee – Mr. Carney asked for volunteers to form a rules committee to meet this summer. Ms. Villani and Ms. Nolin volunteered. Will be taken up at the next meeting.

Best Practices review – no update.

Informational items

Ms. Villani noted various informational items including honors, scholarships, and opportunities.

Appointments/resignations

August 31, 2024 term expirations: Heather Barker, Althea Barton, April Villani, Rebekah Woodman.

Announcement

Next scheduled meetings: June 21, 2024 (if needed), September 20, 2024.

Open Board discussions

None

Public comments

None

Non-public session

None

Adjournment

Ms. Woodman motioned to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Nolin. Roll call: Villani yes, Nolin yes, Woodman yes, Grant yes, Barton yes. Meeting adjourned at 4:36pm.