

HEAC Annual Report
2020 - 2021
Chairman Kathryn Michelotti

The Home Education Advisory Council met this year in September, November, January, March, May, (and June.)

September greeted us with a new school year and unfamiliar circumstances. Many new homeschoolers sent in their letters of intent and needed assistance navigating the new world of chosen home education. Established homeschoolers held live zoom question and answer sessions and posted “Homeschooling 101” videos. We fielded questions ranging from “what does a typical day look like,” to “which math curriculum should I use for my active 2nd grader.” Many of these discussions were held on social media where hundreds of other new homeschoolers could benefit from each question. While none of us wanted circumstances like the ones we were operating under, having the technology available to help one another in real-time gave confidence and relief right when it was needed.

HEAC members spent a lot of time assisting school districts in the proper response to receiving a Letter of Intent. Letters of acknowledgement were often delayed in being returned to new homeschoolers, and families were concerned about truancy. Several school districts were putting expiration dates on their letters of acknowledgement or were asking for further paperwork to be completed. It seemed that the law changes of 2012 were unknown. In response, the HEAC did what we do best, and helped to educate our partners in education on the nuances of homeschooling in New Hampshire.

For parents who were interested in returning their homeschoolers to schools, the HEAC had assisted with transcripts, and competency. Many parents came forward seeking advice on getting recognition from their schools for their children’s homeschool experiences. Members of HEAC, and their respective groups, helped parents by connecting them with guidance counselors and principals inside districts.

In response to re-matriculation questions, Granite State Home Educators produced a ‘Homeschooling Highschool’ video, and the Pembroke School District posted a plan for transferring credit from homeschool to public school in their IHBG policy. In response to the IHBG policy put forth by the NH School Boards Association, the School District Governance Association drafted an alternative policy and made it available to all New Hampshire school board members.

Homeschoolers were also concerned with the cessation of different college board exams. Many homeschoolers used the SAT2 to showcase academic preparation for competitive colleges. With access to ACT, SAT, and even AP exams being limited this year, many homeschoolers were trying to find other ways to show aptitude. This theme of difficult access repeated itself throughout the year. Access to testing, activities, therapies, and classes is a challenge in any normal year. The extra burden of capacity and distancing mandates left homeschoolers even more perplexed.

In November the HEAC approved a draft of the ED 315 rules. It should be noted that the vote

was not unanimous as reservations, which had been repeatedly brought to our attention by a veteran homeschooler, had not been addressed to their satisfaction. A rules subcommittee had worked tirelessly for over 18 months to match the rules to statute. Veteran homeschoolers, new homeschoolers, and representatives from public schools volunteered their time to go through both statute and existing rules line-by-line. Many meetings were held with Department of Education employees and lawyers to verify changes and assure compliance. Our changes to ED 315 were approved by the Board of Education in October and JLCAR in December. They were voted on in December, and took effect 45 days later. I would like to publicly thank all who worked so hard to help make homeschool law clear and concise for current and future homeschoolers.

With the new year came new legislation from both the House and the Senate regarding Education Freedom Accounts. Homeschoolers were encouraged to inform themselves about this legislation and to register to speak at hearings. Support for the bill was divided within the homeschool community.

A second wave of new homeschoolers came with the beginning of the second term. After trying remote learning, dissatisfied parents were trying their hand at homeschooling. Programs to mentor new homeschoolers were in place, so help and answers were ready to be given. Additional programs were also available. The Commissioner had announced a partnership between Khan Academy and the NH Department of Education, providing free small-group tutoring sessions on [Schoolhouse.world](https://www.schoolhouse.world).

With the end of the academic calendar closing in, many homeschoolers were inquiring about another waiver for end of year evaluations. The Commissioner stated there would be no waiver this year. As a result, the veteran homeschool community has been busy assisting first-timers with navigating the processes of assembling a portfolio, testing, and evaluation. The homeschool community is providing more resources for our teens' post-secondary counseling. Granite State Home Educators coordinated with New Hampshire Higher Education Assistance Foundation (NHHEAF) to host three virtual events on college preparation. They also hosted an online discussion with a trades-training provider and hopes to do more to support high-school homeschoolers in the coming year.

During the March meeting, the issue of equal access was raised again. This school year had proven difficult for all, but most especially for those homeschoolers who were used to participating in curricular and co-curricular activities with their local school. Nothing in any of the Governor's orders had suspended equal access, yet districts had spent months denying homeschoolers classes, sports, and activities. A letter was sent to the Commissioner inquiring as to the legality of these actions and inactions by districts, and requesting assistance for homeschoolers. On May 13 a Notice of Hearing to Show Cause was issued against a particularly contrary school district who had repeatedly ignored requests for equal access. The district is not contesting the charges. It is the opinion of the current HEAC Chair that these proceedings will set a precedent for districts' adherence to equal access laws in future.

Some notable homeschool accolades this year include three homeschoolers being awarded the University of New Hampshire's Hamel Scholarships. Additionally, Sam Cole, a homeschooled

teen with a passion for politics, won first place in an essay contest related to New Hampshire being first in the nation's primary. Latitude Learning Resources was able to hold it's World's Fair in a socially-distant manner thanks to inspiration from trunk-or-treat events.

As we look ahead to the summer and next school year, it's hard not to look back at how much we have grown as a community this year. Not only have homeschoolers grown in numbers, more than doubling in the state of New Hampshire, but also in knowledge and fortitude. Together, we have helped each other to try new things for ourselves and our students. The face of education has adapted to meet the needs of students while making room for accommodations, and we have done it faster than ever before. Parents have been empowered by veteran homeschoolers, technology, and even their own children, to believe they can meet the educational needs of their own families, and know they don't have to do it alone. Partnerships formed on the HEAC between public schools, higher education, legislators, and homeschoolers have produced brainstorming sessions and creativity that encompass decades of experience and a wealth of knowledge. I am honored to have chaired this committee through such a tumultuous year. I can not think of any people I would've rather worked with, albeit virtually, throughout this situation.

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.