

## **NH Home Education Advisory Council (HEAC)**

Draft Minutes of March 15, 2024 Meeting

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

**In physical attendance:** Tim Carney, Dianne Nolin, Rep. Katy Peternel, April Villani, Rebekah Woodman

**In remote attendance:** Jill Grant (no one in room, meeting schedule)

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

**Immediate business:** Ms. Nolin volunteered to take minutes in Ms. Barton's absence.

**Agenda review:** Chair noted a request to amend Section XII adding Part E: 2024 AT Resource EXPO. Chair requested to amend Section XI. Part B, Item #1: HB1610 becomes Item #6, thus shifting all others up by one.

**Minutes:** Ms. Nolin requested amendment to remove “new” from pg. 2, line 4 of the January minutes. Amended minutes would then read as: “Ms. Nolin said she received an inquiry from the mother of a high school student asking about the state requirement to complete a Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) application.” Ms. Woodman moved to approve amended January 19, 2023 minutes. Ms. Nolin seconded. Roll call: Grant yes, Nolin yes, Woodman yes, Villani yes

**Public comments:** Meredith resident, member of the public, and school counselor, Kirsten Williams spoke for 3 minutes in person. Ms. Williams submitted a job proposal of Home School Counselor to the Prenda Micro School and DOE Commissioner. During a Zoom call with Ms. Williams the Commissioner recommended that she contact HEAC. Ms. Williams sees her job proposal as a way to propose helping people in home school settings to access mental health assistance, as well as helping assess children's mental health, as well as maybe supporting parents and guidance, and students who aren't a part of public education. Ms. Williams provided a copy of her resume and job proposal to the HEAC members.

**Appointments/resignations review:** Terms expiring August 31, 2024 include Heather Barker, Althea Barton, April Villani, and Rebekah Woodman. Ms. Villani reminded those members with expiring terms to initiate re-nomination and subsequent re-appointment with the Commissioner. Ms. Villani also asked the members to consider nominating people for the 3 open HEAC positions from Home Education Associations organized in NH.

### **New Business:**

A) Ms. Villani asked for a volunteer to create the **State Board of Education Annual Report** per Ed 315.09 which is prepared using meeting minutes that must be prepared by the May 17, 2024 meeting.

B) Ms. Woodman spoke on the **Prenda Learning Pods** as part of RSA 193A and the differences between Prenda requirements and home education requirements, in addition to concerns about the current legislative climate. She questioned what will happen to Prenda as it is funded using COVID money which is due to end by September 30, 2024.

Mr. Carney explained that Prenda was funded with federal grants and, as such, are required to have

outcome and performance measures. He points out that Prenda may not continue to be a RSA 193A program if the funding comes from another source when the federal funding is gone.

Her research includes the following: Prenda must take state assessment test, are aligned with state standards, take quarterly assessment using the online IReady system. Prenda World has attendance requirements, while progress is tracked by Prenda. Prenda can review academic reports and provide guidance to attempt to improve student performance. Prenda has “partnership” meetings with parents and students. Prenda participants do not need to maintain portfolios. She was unable to ascertain where the testing records go, in addition to those being sent to the parents.

Home educated students under RSA 193A are not required to comply with same set of rules that the Prenda educated do, although they both fall under RSA 193A. The concern is that this could erode the rights and freedoms of those who are home educated under RSA 193A.

Ms. Villani points out that parents may not be aware of the additional Prenda requirements that go above and beyond RSA 193A.

Ms. Grant asks if Prenda operates as a vendor or are people being reimbursed and able to use EFA funds, suggesting that they would then need to submit their records of educational attainment to continue to receive EFA funds.

Ms. Woodman states that the EFAs are not required to take state assessment, but can choose to as they are subject to the same options available under RSA 193A.

3:00PM Mr. Koski joins the meeting in-person.

Ms. Villani asked about whether the Rekindling Curiosity Grant is also federally funded. Mr. Carney answers affirmatively. What will be the federal funding end-date? Are there outcome and performance measures for this program, similar to the federal funds for Prenda, as well? Mr. Carney will inquire within the DOE.

Ms. Woodman mentions that there are no new Prenda Pod requests for next year.

**C) Student Internships:** Ms. Villani asked, with child labor laws restricting work hours, would an apprenticeship be prohibited during school hours? Someone had reached out to Ms. Villani inquiring. Ms. Villani suggested that perhaps a conversation with a Department of Labor representative and a possible presentation on the benefits would be advantageous to both home educators and the labor force. Mr. Carney recommended a possible presentation to HEAC. Rep. Peternel expressed an interest in participating in any such meetings or discussions.

Mr. Carney also mentioned that the Learn Everywhere program expanded yesterday with the approval of Equine Therapeutic which is an opportunity for students to earn credits in non-traditional ways.

### **Continuing Business:**

**Best Practices Review:** Mr. Carney reached out to Attorney Brown after the NH Attorney General issued the Memorandum on the Right-to-Know Law on March 14, 2024. Attorney Brown had not reviewed them, but had committed to doing so prior to HEAC's next meeting.

**Commissioner's report/NHED updates:** Mr. Carney presented the NHED Home Education Report.

Item #1 – NHED Home Education web-page update – Mr. Carney's staff is working on preparing a FAQ document. They're planning to develop an informational webinar to present to public school districts about the updated home education laws and rules, and schedule open office hours once a month. Mr. Carney mentioned how the majority of his time is spent on home education issues and home education is only one of the five programs that he manages. For the past three months, the DOE has been trying to hire a part-time employee in the department.

Item #2 – Vacant HEAC memberships – Mr. Carney has been in contact with Ms. Patterson, from the Keene area, who is researching the idea of creating a home education based school. She may also be interested in participating on HEAC since her recent move into the state, but would need to be nominated by a Home Education Association.

Ms. Grant would be willing to discuss an open HEAC position and the nomination process with Ms. Patterson.

Item #3 – Home education associations – Mr. Carney has reached out to the existing home education associations on the NHED web-page and would like to expand that list. The Commissioner has been helpful in providing association names, given his experience with home education. Mr. Carney acknowledged that some groups do not want to be on the DOE web-page.

Item #4 – Home education commencement notifications are issued to parents for students. Mr. Carney suggested that changing the rules or laws of Ed 315.15, as it pertains to these certificates, could allow for issuing certificates to prior home educated students who are now over 18 years old who seek a certificate for themselves. For instance, he recently had two Marine candidates, who were 22 and 25 years old, respectively, who did not have copies of the certificates issued to their parents on their behalf. Ironically, these men were the first two Marine recruits in the past 16 months and there is great decline in recruits in all branches. Mr. Carney believes that this certificate issue has occurred about 15 times over the past year and an amendment allowing those over 18 years of age to acquire a commencement certificate without their parent's signature would be beneficial.

Mr. Carney also suggested that Ed 315.15(b)(3) be reviewed to eliminate the term "home school" and replace it with "home educated". He believes that this will possibly reduce confusion and highlight differences between the EFA and RSA 193A home education pathways.

Mr. Carney then explained how parents contact him regarding home schooling 5 year olds. He suggested that expanding the age range for home education to 5 through 22 would allow for Equal Access as public school students under RSA 193:1:c.

Ms. Villani stated that Ed315.15 already provides for Equal Access to any student over 18 who has not filed a certificate of completion under RSA 193A 1:c

Mr. Koski pointed out how complicated this would be for sports participants, such as a 21 year old, on a high school team.

Ms. Villani recalled how Attorney Brown had recommended forming a Rules Committee. If there is a need during summer months, this ensures HEAC will have ample opportunity to review and prepare feedback prior to approval by the State Board of Education.

Ms. Woodman agreed. Ms. Villani suggested that this issue get on the agenda for the next meeting.

Ms. Villani inquired about members of HEAC participating in the creation of DOE webinar(s). Mr. Carney agreed that there is a need to produce webinars for parents, participating agencies, and school district administrators and would appreciate HEAC participation and review.

### **Member reports:**

Rep. Peternel will provide her report during the legislative section of the meeting.

Ms. Nolin said that Rep Peternel's legislative update will cover the hearings and executive sessions which she followed. Ms. Villani said CUHE saw a lot of activity related to the bills which were pending in the legislature. There are many questions related to the solar eclipse in April. Questions have come up related to apprenticeship and work hours. We continue to see growth and engagement. Mr. Koski mentioned that there is continued confusion about the differences between EFA student vs. home educated student and what is expected within the law.

### **Rulemaking/legislative updates:**

**Ed 704.02** High School Equivalency Program - Admission to Testing for Home Educated Students. Ms. Villani received an email from Ms. Wheeler which stated that she had met with the rulemaking staff person and the department's lawyer aiming to introduce it at the State Board of Education meeting in May (barring any legal issues with the proposed language). Ms. Wheeler submitted the Home Education Section language exactly as agreed upon last year and will provide an update after the meeting with the NH Education legal team. Mr. Carney stated that the State Board will potentially adopt the initial proposal before it heads back to JLCAR and then it would return to the State Board for approval.

**HB 1012** passed on consent and is headed to the Senate. This bill exempts from criminal penalty certain parenting decisions intended to encourage a child's independence and freedom.

**CACR 17** was up for reconsideration but had not been voted on yet. This bill concerns the rights of parents. Providing that parents shall have a fundamental right to direct the upbringing, education, and care of their minor children.

**HB 1402** relating to establishing a procedure for a high school proficiency exam waiver of mandatory school attendance. This was referred for Interim Study.

**SB 444** relative to the public posting of Board of Education agenda items and meeting materials. Referred for Interim Study.

**HB 1128** relative to the definition of a scholarship organization for purposes of the education tax credit was Indefinitely Postponed.

**HB 1652** relative to establishing a local education freedom account program was voted ITL. This was the third attempt of this type of bill.

**CACR25** related to the rights of children and parents was voted ITL.

**HB 1610** relative to standardized assessment data for participants in education freedom accounts was voted ITL by 20-0 in Executive Session. The sponsor of the bill recommended ITL. Approximately 500 people showed up for the hearing of March 4, 2024 to provide testimony.

Ms. Grant inquired about the status of **HB1665** related to the EFA program which is presently in the House Finance Committee.

Ms. Nolin inquired about SB339 and SB1066 related to Free Application for Student Aid (FAFSA) requirements. **SB339** has been sent to the House-it repeals the FAFSA filing requirement. **SB1066** hearing on March 19, 2024 at 10AM.

**Informational Items:** Solar Eclipse resources, CCSNH is sponsoring an Early College Exploration event for free for home school families, 2024 Congressional Art Competition, Currier Museum home education art opportunities, 2024 AT(Assistive Technology) Resource Expo is May 16, 11-4PM, at Granite State College.

**Announcements:** HEAC will meet on April 19, 2024, 2:30-4:30PM to prepare the annual report and potentially to discuss legislative updates. The following meeting will be held on May 17, 2024.

**Open Board Discussions:** Mr. Carney encouraged HEAC members to spread the word about “Child Find” to let parents know that this free service is available. The DOE may add information about it on their web-page so that people know that they can approach the school district to evaluate a child's academic needs at no cost.

**Public comments:** Ms. Williams used 3 minutes to further discuss her proposal for a home school and/or Prenda counselor position.

**Non-public session:** none

**Motion to adjourn** 3:58PM made by Ms. Woodman. Second by Ms. Nolin Roll call: Koski yes, Grant yes, Nolin yes, Woodman yes, Villani yes

Minutes DN