

Home Education Advisory Council

Annual Report 2022-23

Approved May 19, 2023

Chair Michael Koski and Vice Chair April Villani

The Home Education Advisory Council (HEAC) continued this past year to fulfill its role to facilitate communication between the NH Department of Education, various education stakeholders, and the homeschool community. The council worked to promote an understanding of home education as well as the various perspectives of the education community. We listened to and shared our thoughts with the NH representatives and senator who have seats on the council. The NH Department of Education incorporated HEAC's advice for the home education rules during the rule making process. The Office of Adult Education also graciously listened to our concerns as they worked through the rule making process.

New Hampshire has continued to see growth in home education and a continued need to inform new families about the requirements and opportunities of the choice to home educate. Participation on the Home Education Advisory Council keeps its home education representatives as well as all of its other members up to date on the changes in home education law and rules. This assists the homeschool organizations to provide their members with information about how to initiate and carry out a home education program in New Hampshire. The fruits of participation on this council can also be seen in other participating stakeholders. For example, our NH School Administrators Association representative, understanding the law and the perspective of homeschool families, was able to assist her public school district to develop a way to respond and document when a parent of an enrolled student tells staff they have decided to homeschool. We have seen many other benefits of the council's work.

The Department of Education entered the rule making process this year to amend the home education rules for consistency with the changes brought about by the passage of House Bill 1663. HEAC reviewed and commented on a draft of the updated rules and assisted with clear documentation of the three options to whom parents may send their notifications. The council commented on where to incorporate in the rules consideration of a child's age, ability, or disability when evaluating educational progress. HEAC also provided suggestions for a Technical Assistance Advisory being written by the Department related to these legal changes.

The Office of Adult Education is also going through their rule making process. Their administrator, Sarah Wheeler, attended a HEAC meeting to discuss concerns pertaining to home educators using the GED alternative, the HiSET Exam. Council members were able to explain the ramifications of the current wording of ED 704 adult education rules for home educator access to the exam as well as access to various public-school opportunities if the exam is taken by a home educated student.

Elizabeth Brown, the Attorney for the Department, gave the council a presentation on the Right to Know law. This year, HEAC has worked on best practices to support transparency, accessibility, accountability, and responsiveness of the council. Homeschool families, educators, legislators, and members of the public are encouraged to bring questions and concerns to our advisory body.

The council had been hearing about confusion surrounding the Education Freedom Accounts and was seeking to clarify the distinction between students being educated under RSA 194-F Education Freedom Accounts and RSA 193-A Home Education. There are separate and distinct legal requirements and opportunities in each of these educational pathways of which parents and education stakeholders need to be aware. HEAC is pleased to have met the Department's new administrator for the Education Freedom Account program, Brian Voelk. He will be a wonderful resource going forward.

On behalf of the Home Education Advisory Council, we would like to thank the Board of Education for taking the time to learn about the council's work. We hope to continue to be a strong asset to the home education community, education stakeholders, and the NH Department of Education.

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 315.09, 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.

*******HEAC MEMBERS *******

- Heather Barker, NH School Administrators Association
 - Althea Barton, New Hampshire Homeschooling Coalition
 - Michael Koski (Chair), Christian Home Educators NH/S.ME
 - Katelyn Kuttub, House of Representatives
 - Michelle Levell, Granite State Home Educators
 - Jennifer Pereira, Catholics United for Home Education
 - Katy Peternel, NH House of Representatives
 - April Villani (Vice Chair), Catholics United for Home Education
 - Ruth Ward, NH Senate
 - Rebekah Woodman, Home Education Community
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