

Home Education Advisory Council Meeting 6/16/2022

Meeting called to order 3:40pm

Present in person: Jen Pereira (co-presiding), Amanda Weeden (co-presiding), Mike Koski, April Villiani, Sarah Cheek, Heather Barker, Senator Ruth Ward, Tim Carney
Member of the Public on Zoom: Michelle Levell

Motion to Accept April Minutes by April

Motion seconded Tim

All in favor.

Motion passed.

HEAC Members were reminded to look at term expiration dates. Cordelli and Ward terms are up, no one else's is expiring this year.

Jen motioned to discuss continued business.

Motion seconded Tim

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.

Discussion 1: Equal application under the law.

Where do alternative educational pathways fall under the law?

As a body, it's our duty to represent the interests of home educators, and thus recommend that all students who notify under RSA 193-a must be able to enjoy the same freedoms under RSA193-a. The home educator representatives on the Council voiced the view that subsequent choice of alternate pathways with their own standards or requirements are secondary to RSA 193-a freedoms and requirements due to notification status as traditional home educators. We believe it is important to avoid the requirement to notify under RSA193-a in order to gain access to alternative learning programs or online charter school and have freedoms under RSA193-a restricted because of program requirements.

No precedent must be set otherwise, no matter the type of program, how it is funded or any additional/alternate requirements decided upon by said program.

Examples are currently: Prenda, VLACS, KAIPOD learning pods.

Tim argued that he doesn't believe it matters whether the program is funded if the parent is deciding to choose to use it.

Jen said to Tim and the council, "In what I wrote [in the motion], I didn't mention funded or unfunded. What freedoms are in current law are what we are concerned about preserving."

Before voting to agree, Heather clarified, "What we want to send to the commissioner is a concern that we want to protect those liberties, or freedoms, which would be eroded by adding other things in that require things, other pieces that are not consistent with these guarantees. So, in other words, if you are using Prenda and you can do those four things it can sit in that bucket [home ed law]. If you're using Prenda and it can't, then it can't sit in that bucket."

At the conclusion of the Council's discussion, we reached agreement that all people notifying under RSA 193-A must be able to enjoy the same freedoms; otherwise you have a

precedent where you have this subset of people who are told you have to notify in order to access certain educational programs who don't have all the freedoms, and as Tim added, "even though they chose that."

Jen requests looking at the law to determine if another route to compulsory attendance already exists for hybrid programs. If no other option exists, it is the opinion of the Council that notifying parents may exercise their freedoms under RSA193-a. Perhaps adding a fifth pathway legislatively for educational innovation is a consideration.

Motion made to accept wording for annual report by Amanda.

Motion seconded by Tim.

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.

" NH Home Education Law 193-A guarantees the following freedoms to home education families in New Hampshire: 1. Parents can choose their child's curriculum which does not need to be aligned with state standards. 2. Parents have multiple choices for annual assessment which need not be standardized testing and does not need to be NH State assessments. 3. Parents are not required to submit any testing or assessment data to any department or agency of the state. 4. Parents have multiple choices for homeschool notification "participating" agencies. The council recommends that any educational program -- whether a NH charter school, a program created by federal contract or money, or other program of the State of NH -- which does not allow for these freedoms should not fall under RSA 193-A home education law. Rather, such programs should fall under another option to fulfill NH RSA 193-1 Compulsory Attendance Law. "

Discussion 2:

HISSET requirements and recommendation for update in light of current law. It is the opinion of the Council that requirements to take the HISSET must be fully in compliance with current home education requirements. As such, the Council recommends waiving the requirement for the Participating Agency to sign off on 16/17 year olds taking the test. Also that any rule making pertaining to this issue take this into consideration.

Motion to vote on HiSet recommendation and to include completed motion in annual report.

Motion seconded by Heather

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.

Tim: interesting to note that the Commissioner is on board with this recommendation and he (Tim) will be meeting with Adult Education rep Sarah Wheeler.

"HEAC recommends 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) and asks that any rule making pertaining to the HiSET exam take this request into consideration. The parent is the party responsible for directing the home educated child's program and is the one who signs off to authorize youth employment and self-certify completion of a home education program in NH. The parent should also be the party responsible for signing off to allow their child to take the HiSET exam."

New Business:

Look at draft Year End Report

Many thanks to Jen Pereira for putting it together.

Tim mentioned a grammatical change and feedback that page numbers would be helpful. No changes affect the content.

Motion to accept year end report as amended made by Jen.

Motion seconded by April

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.

Issue of Council meeting day/time change brought to table to accommodate legislators.

Third Fridays,, every other month, 2:30-4pm beginning Fall 2022.

Motion to change meeting time by April.

Seconded by Heather.

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.

Discussion on adoption of HB1663 into law and rule making:

Tim stated that there is no defined timeline for rule making but that Council will be notified. Atty Fenton is aware. Updated Equal Access policies must be in effect by August 21, 2022. All other updates effective 6/2/22.

April asked: What are the repercussions of a district in non-compliance by not adopting a policy on equal access?

Tim and Heather answered that there is a federal compliance office. Discussion continues regarding the communication chain, ways to assist in communication and experiences by our public school members.

There is an option for Equal Access Policy that is available to districts. A technical advisory by DOE would help ensure that districts are aware of the changes, Tim will connect with Nate Greene to discuss. Heather will bring this information to the NH School Administrators Association and Special Education committee.

Question is raised by April: how are home educated students with special needs being supported in public school curricular and co-curricular activities through equal access?

Discussion continued with Heather Barker sharing opinion on current law as it pertains to this issue. Nondiscrimination practice is for all students "under 504 and that law trumps everything." Heather stated that she has funds available to provide home educated students with supports needed if joining public school through equal access, stating that students need to be supported by districts.

Amanda stated that in her experience as a Special Needs Homeschooling Advocate that this is not the case, and students who need supports are generally told that they can not be accommodated.

Senator Ward shared that the new Child Advocate Office would be available to assist in these issues.

HEAC is thankful for the collaboration between members in the effort to provide updated information to representative organizations.

Discussion:

Jen introduced new topic of NH Alternative Pathways Project and National Center for College and Career Transitions hosting focus groups for development of DOE "toolkit."

Tim explains that they are interviewing representatives from all educational pathways. He explained that there are multiple ways that districts are made aware of changes to rules/laws for example Friday Forum, monthly calls.

New topic of scholarship application process and ideas shared to assist home educated students. Suggestion to add to DOE website, contact local guidance counselor.

Member Reports:

Heather: will update her member organizations

Tim: YES scholarship update: guidance document is available and he will be doing a trial application. Will report back if there are difficulties. Tim will contact HEAC Representatives Allison and Catie for any follow-up information. HISET discussed. DOE website update is in the works. Requested submissions for FAQ section for home education section of website.

Sarah: Noted that most new prospective students have been testing at 2 grade levels behind. Learning loss is an issue we are all seeing.

Jen: consistent new membership, CUHE graduation, Homeschool Summit on June 25th in Rochester.

Amanda: continued growth, lots of used book sales, questions about year end assessments/portfolios/ending home education program. Public schools are contacting home educated students to ask if returning. GSHE finds this inappropriate.

Update on admissions requirements out of sync with current home education law at Keene State and NHTI: Many thanks to Michelle Levell for working with Admissions representatives from Keene State in order to update policies and their website. She contacted NHTI in regards to the same outdated policies surrounding admission for home educated students but has not heard back since the initial response. NHTI's website has not been updated, she will be in contact soon to request changes.

Kaipod Learning discussion and more confusion surrounding what it is, target market and legalities. GSHE hosting two Intro workshops 8/3, 8/22 see granitestatehomeeducators.org for details. Amanda will be representing GSHE at the Catholic Homeschool Summit on 6/25 at the Special Needs Homeschooling table.

Mike: will update NH Association of School Principals on new law.

Public comment: Michelle Levell from GSHE recommends that a secondary district equal access policy be made accessible as the current sample as available has compliance concerns. April motioned to end meeting 5:37 pm

Mike seconded.

All in favor is unanimous.

Motion passed.