

HEAC Annual Report
2018 - 2019
Chairman Kathryn Michelotti

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.*

2018-2019

The Council usually meets in September, November, January, March, and May.

In September HEAC was tasked with reviewing the ED 315 rules to ensure they accurately reflected the statute. A seven-member Rule Review Committee was established in November which met five times from December through the end of March. The committee consisted of public and homeschool representatives, and each brought a valuable perspective to the rules. Each revision was brought to the Board of Education's lawyer for review. In all, the rules went through about 5 revisions before it was brought back to HEAC for approval. The resulting suggested revisions were presented to the Council at its May meeting.

In October a technical Advisory was issued by Commissioner Edelblut addressing questions received by the Department of Education regarding homeschooling. HEAC members had received many notifications that there were misunderstandings of the role of school districts as reporting agencies, and what information was required to be provided by the homeschool family. The technical advisory reiterated the statute and rules which outline the role of the participating agency clearly.

At the January meeting, Vice-Chair Kathryn Michelotti replaced George D'Orazio as Chair of the Council. George continued as Chair of the rules review committee and Vice-Chair of the Council.

NHSAA representative Helen Rist and HEAC chair Kathryn Michelotti gave a presentation at the January NHSAA meeting regarding the technical advisory and to raise awareness of HEAC among administrators. By identifying their own NHSAA representative on HEAC and putting a face to the name of the new HEAC Chair, we hope that issues of concern can be addressed and hopefully resolved early on.

An art contest was held as part of the celebration of the Bicentennial of the NH State House. HEAC disseminated this information amongst the homeschool community. A large amount of homeschoolers from co-ops and individual homeschool programs participated in the art contest. Two homeschoolers were selected from the South Central Region for First and Third place!

An issue of concern to homeschoolers about VLACS procedure remains unsolved. VLACS is (understandably) unwilling to accept a student full-time until the student has demonstrated the ability to handle the "virtual" environment. The difficulty arises when a parent wants to remove a child from the school environment quickly. In this case, the parent is informed by VLACS to file a home education notification - even though the parent has no desire to homeschool. We understand VLACS hesitancy to accept, as full-time, a student who hasn't demonstrated "virtual" ability. But forcing a parent to notify as a homeschooler is not a real solution either. HEAC is still in communications with VLACS to try to devise a solution.

Several missing years of HEAC Chair reports have been located, however we are insisting the Department of Education produce the rest. Key issues in the homeschooling community have been discussed at past meetings, and these records are important to HEAC's history. For example, a guideline that parents directly instruct 51% of a homeschooled child's education has needed clarification. With the increase of co-ops, homeschool group classes, and online courses, parents were concerned about the 51%. Discovering the origin of this outdated guideline has helped current homeschoolers ensure they are in compliance with laws and rules.

A highlight of the HEAC meetings is sharing some of the things that homeschoolers across the state are up to. From usual academic achievements like science fairs, spelling bees, world's fairs, and history showcases to homeschool art shows, theatrical performances, chess clubs, robotics teams, 4-H clubs, and Model United Nations, New Hampshire's homeschoolers are an impressive group. New co-ops are being established all over the state as well. Groups of homeschoolers are coming together to learn about forensics, sign language, Little House on the Prairie, martial arts, origami, biology, coding, and civics - and these are just the co-ops I myself am directly involved in. There are Not Back to School Picnics, an Unschool and Educational Freedom presentation by author Kerry McDonald, SCHEA monthly meetings, and Co-ops like Voyagers, Classical Conversations and Agape are growing in membership every year. This year alone there were at least 4 homeschool proms around the state and several homeschool graduation ceremonies. It's an exciting time to be part of such a vibrant and engaged community.

HEAC's role as liaison is growing and changing along with the educational options in New Hampshire. As homeschooling gains in popularity, and alternative schooling choices become more customizable, there is a communication gap to be bridged between representatives of all forms of education. As the only state in the Union with a council of this kind, it's important HEAC be the best example we can be of open dialogue and discourse. The discussions and teamwork I have witnessed this first year as Chair have inspired me. The dedication of all of HEAC's representatives to the education of New Hampshire's children, is obvious in their willingness to listen, learn, and openly advise on this council. I'm privileged to volunteer on this council with some incredibly smart and hard-working educators.