

Vermont Home Education Network

* PO Box 72 * Woodbury, VT * 05681 * mountainfoldvt@gmail.com * 802.472.5491 * www.vhen.org *

Senate Education Committee, March 23, 2023 Testimony by Retta Dunlap

I am a retired homeschooling mom who homeschooled four children K-12 and has worked for the past 25 years as a statewide advocate for homeschooling here in the State House, with the Agency of Education, and with homeschoolers at large. I am not a lawyer but there is one law that I quite familiar with and its legislative intent and that is 166b the home study statute.

Who are homeschoolers:

Vermont homeschooling families come from all walks of life and points of view such as: Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Wiccan, Atheist, or Democrat, Republican, Progressive, Libertarian or no label at all. They have college degrees or only high school diplomas and even some without a high school diploma. Some are licensed teachers and some have never taught anyone. In 2001, Dr Mitchell Stevens, wrote a book called Kingdom of Children about homeschooling in the Midwest and summed it up this way: “What distinguishes homeschoolers from other parents is not their basic understanding of childhood or level of education but rather the exceptional extent to which homeschoolers have elaborated that understanding and put it into practice.” ^{Page 70} This is what VHEN is built on. I homeschooled on purpose as I saw it as a natural progression of raising my own children. Many who are choosing to homeschool today, are not all choosing to do so as a first choice, like I did. They have reasons why an intuitional setting is not working for their child and they will also go to extraordinary lengths to accomplish what their child needs in that moment. All in all, over 70,000+ children in Vermont have been educated from home and these families have made tremendous changes and had positive experiences even if they only homeschooled for a year or two. Sometimes that is all that is needed to reset the education of a child as homeschooling is not for everyone. (See attached chart for enrollment number over the years.)

Current Enrollment Process verses proposed process:

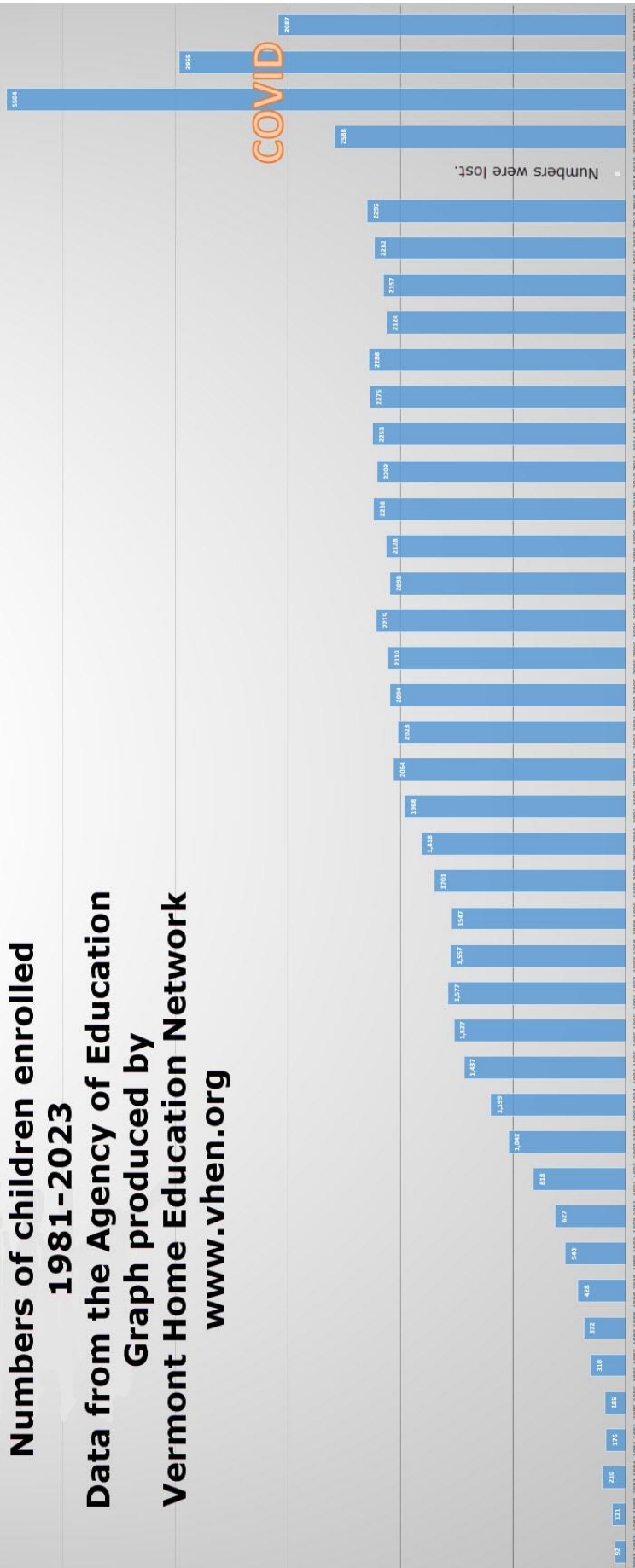
The current enrollment process is the submission of a course of study and an annual assessment. If it is not worded just right a parent often has to add a phrase or two to make it complete. This serves no purpose to anyone in this process. From my point of view of 25 years – submission of this paper work does nothing except to stress out parents and over burden Agency staff with the technicalities of it all. The language in this bill is from the AOE and homeschoolers did see something similar in January of 2022 from the AOE which we had input on. What the state must know is who these kids are, where they are, and who is responsible for their education. This new language does exactly that in a straightforward way while still requiring parents to do certain things like keeping it on file at home which is something they already do.

Over the years that I complied with the current home study statute, I created 49 enrollment notices. It did cramp my style as I always knew I had to hand in paper work and so I would constantly be fighting against the “teaching to the test” mentality that crept into my homeschooling program. I always did what was best for my children and went with their learning flow but it did not help that I had to create meaningless paper work every summer. I always had a course of study on file at home. It just did not look like the fabricated one I handed in to the state as my course of study was fluid. Unlike an institutional school I had way more flexibility to adjust what we did on a daily basis to keep the love of learning moving forward and still on track for my children being productive adults.

I do have a couple of minor changes for clarity. I do not want to alter the substance of what the AOE has presented to you. And I have brought the changes to the attention of Sec French who said he would bring them to his team.

1. Many homeschoolers are concerned about how the standardized testing option is worded as it needs to be clearer as to who can administer it. I suggest we borrow a phrase from the current statute to add to the current language of the bill: **Page 5 line15-16** add “or administered in a manner approved by the testing company”.
2. The new language talks about two different types of notices that parents are to submit. One is an enrollment notice found in section (a) and then there is the annual notice found in section (k). Unfortunately, the word annual is found in section (a) as well and the word annual needs to be removed on **Page 4 line 20** for clarity. The intent is to submit a complete enrollment notice once, it is like an affidavit, and then to confirm each year to the Sec of Ed every year, by an annual notice, that the family will continue homeschool under the enrollment notice found in section (a).

**Numbers of children enrolled
1981-2023**
Data from the Agency of Education
Graph produced by
Vermont Home Education Network
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Year	Children
1981-1982	92
1982-1983	121
1983-1984	210
1984-1985	176
1985-1986	185
1986-1987	310
1987-1988	372
1988-1989	428
1989-1990	540
1990-1991	627
1991-1992	818
1992-1993	1,042
1993-1994	1,199
1994-1995	1,437
1995-1996	1,527
1996-1997	1,577
1997-1998	1,557
1998-1999	1,547
1999-2000	1,701
2000-2001	1,818
2001-2002	1,968
2002-2003	2,064
2003-2004	2,023
2004-2005	2,094
2005-2006	2,110
2006-2007	2,215
2007-2008	2,098
2008-2009	2,128
2009-2010	2,238
2010-2011	2,209
2011-2012	2,251
2012-2013	2,275
2013-2014	2,286
2014-2015	2,124
2015-2016	2,157
2016-2017	2,232
2017-2018	2,295
2018-2019	*
2019-2020	2,588
2020-2021	5,504
2021-2022	3,965
2022-2023	3,087

2018-2019 – numbers were lost
2022-2023 – as of 10/24/22, likely a bit higher today