

CHE Chairperson's report 2023

Greetings dear fellow Home Educators,

I think everyone will agree that the words BELA bill summarises the past year! We have joked that the PCBE members probably are having dreams of home educators rejecting the BELA Bill and especially Clause 37 after the public hearings.

CHE have submitted written submissions at every opportunity we had, including at the BELA Bill Public Hearings.

Lizelle Rademeyer, Jennifer Hanekom, my son, Ruan Ueckermann, and I, even had the privilege to represent an oral submission on behalf of the National Association for Homeschooling, with Dr. Michael Donnelly from the American Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) to the PCBE.

Co-op

It is my honour to welcome Jennifer Hanekom to our team and to thank her for her exceptional support and hard work to help us to mobilise our efforts during the BELA Bill oral hearings. I invited her to cooperate on everything BELA bill related and I can't imagine what I would have done without her.

Jennifer organised a very successful public hearings campaign in the Western Cape and then also represented CHE at the A- list meetings in parliament.

Here is Jennifer's reflections regarding the BELA bill Proceedings:

"With all of the months of public hearings finally behind us, and a bit of a winter reprieve, I eagerly set out for Parliament on August 29th, feeling refreshed, and ready to see what concessions the Parliamentary Committee had decided to include in their A-list. This A-list would tell us how they planned to adjust Clause 37 in response to our impassioned submissions.

The meeting started late. It seems the ANC was in caucus to discuss their position on a particularly sticky situation. Namely, 9501 **unprocessed** submissions. This issue previously came to light during a live-broadcasted parliamentary meeting, where ACDP representative, Marie Sukers, fought tenaciously to not proceed before those voices were heard, properly processed, and a full report provided. She was backed up by representatives of the DA, Honourable Nodada and Honourable Van Zyl. Honourable Boshoff of the FF+ party also raised his concerns.

With so much push-back from multiple members of parliament, it was surprising to see the Honourable Chairperson Mbinqo-Gigaba try to bulldoze the process forward. Those concerned were not having it, and they walked-out of parliament, bringing the meeting to a stand-still.

Fast-forward to August 29th, and the ANC members were still busy discussing what they would do about this problem, long after the meeting was supposed to start.

After 10am, once everyone was finally present and situated, it became apparent that many chats had taken place behind closed doors. Honourable Van der Walt of the DA was back after a lengthy absence, and while she had followed the whole public hearing

process through the live-broadcasts, she was stunned to return to find that there was no overarching report for her to work from.

This showed the futility, and unconstitutionality, of trying to move forward without having processed all of the submissions and having compiled a comprehensive report, and seems to be the straw that finally broke the camel's back... or at least the ANC's attempts to move forward without doing so. The meeting was adjourned early, with the votes nearly unanimous that they wouldn't be able to move forward without first processing the outstanding submissions. It was also decided that Political Parties would be allowed to provide oversight of this processing. The ANC members were visibly frustrated.

As the meeting ended, there was some time to talk to those on the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education, and CHE used every opportunity available to promote our cause, present solutions through CHE's proposal of changes to Clause 37, and show that we are there to work together to find solutions.

I was asked if CHE would be able to help with providing oversight. We willingly accepted this challenge, and within 48 hours, had 5 teams of 4 ready to mobilize. (A huge thank you to each of those 20 souls who were willing!)

It soon became apparent that the Portfolio Committee was not having as easy of a time organising the processing that we had been asked to provide oversight for. Delays came regularly, communication was few-and-far-between, and in the end we were told we could only provide 1 person for oversight, not a team of 4.

Despite the disorganisation and attempts to discourage or intimidate, our representative arrived on Tuesday morning at 9am as planned. Thankfully, she was flexible and made the best of the situation, as the processing was delayed until 2pm. We received valuable insight that day, thanks to her excellent note-taking and calm-cool-collected attitude towards everything that happened. They took a break at 4pm, which is when we were scheduled to leave. We were told they would work into the night.

The next day, our representative arrived at 9am, and again, processing was delayed until 2. Unfortunately, they wouldn't let the observer in without an escort, and the escort was delayed. Our Wednesday observer was ready to go, despite the previous day's discouragement, when we received the message at 1am that the processing had been finished.

Considering previously it took years to process our written submissions, their ability to suddenly process nearly 1000 submissions per hour was... astounding.

September 12th we were back in Parliament to once again observe. We arrived hopeful that all the behind-the-scenes efforts and processing of submissions had perhaps had some sort of impact on the A-list. However, it did not take long to realise that the "cement had already dried" so to speak, and the ruling party was not interested in listening to, or solving, problems in the bill, but just getting it OUT of their jurisdiction. And so, they bulldozed forward, ignoring objection after objection brought forward by the ACDP, DA, and FF+ parties. It was a disappointing display.

To give a complete update, let me just include here an overview of the concessions that were made to us on the A-list.

1. Assessment only at the end of each phase, vs. yearly.
2. No home visits, unless just cause is shown, and parents must be notified first.
3. "Competent Assessor" became defined as "a recognized professional body in the field of education" which gives room for various interpretations.
4. The definition for "basic education" underwent changes, broadening the scope of the definition.

I was happy to later learn that the opposition parties were purposely making sure their objections were being recorded, to strengthen the case for procedural negligence, when this case goes to court. The next meeting is scheduled for next week, where we'll discuss what lies ahead. For now, the BELA bill moves on to the National Assembly and then to The National Council of Provinces. (NCOP) Don't you worry! There will be more opportunities for public participation before all is said and done, so please stay tuned."

Since I have asked Mr. Bouwe Van Der Eems to speak about the BELA Bill later in this meeting, I will now reflect back on all the other things that CHE were involved in this past year.

Feedback on meetings

The WCJLC

We had no meetings last year as Mr. Louw from the WCED was on extended sick leave. This year we had 2 meetings, in February and June and another scheduled later in September.

The meetings were facilitated by Mr. Deon Louw from the Western Cape Education Department and attended by various people representing the home education community which included, amongst other, home education associations, parents, educators, curriculum service providers and online schools. Officials from the WCED by far outnumbered the home educators.

POINTS OF DISCUSSION:

1. The Education landscape:

Mr Bouwe Van Der Eems presented The Education landscape document, which is a reflection of the various educational institutions and modalities catered (and not catered) for by the existing regulatory framework.

2. Status of home education in the WC:

Mr Louw presented the statistics of the current status of applications approved in the province. We currently have 2526 learners registered for home education in the province.

3. DBE online home education management system:

Mr Louw informed the meeting that the DBE is developing an online home education management system. The system will be hosted on the Luritz System.

4. Draft Constitution:

We are still in the process of developing a Draft Constitution for the WCJLC.

5. Monitoring of Home Education:

Mr Louw informed the meeting that the WCED do not have the capacity to monitor home education as per the requirements in the Home Education Policy. However, the WCED is busy developing a Google monitoring form that they want to use in the third term. This will enable the WCED to get feedback on the progress that learners are making and to provide support to parents that have challenges.

6. Memorandum: Admission policy for home learners at public schools:

Mr van der Eems presented the memorandum which stems from Clause 37 of the BELA Bill which proposes to amend S51 of the South African Schools Act (SASA) to require that “(iii) the proposed home education programme is suitable for the learner’s age, grade level and ability and predominantly covers the acquisition of content and skills at least comparable to the relevant national curriculum determined by the Minister;”

The memorandum proposes solutions to cater for home education learners when they return to mainstream schools. Various members as well as guests gave their views on the document. The WCED thanked Mr van der Eems for the memorandum and acknowledge that the admission of home educated learners to mainstream schools can be a challenge and it is an area where we as the JLC can assist with this.

The WCED will bring the content to the attention of the DBE.

I would like to encourage home educators to participate in the WCJLC.

National Task Team (NTT)

Members from the JLC’s of each province should be appointed to serve on the NTT. Unfortunately most provinces have not formed JLC’s and therefore home educators are underrepresented in the NTT.

The mandate of the task team is to develop regulations on home education. The regulations must clarify how the law should be implemented.

The reference documents we use to inform the development of the regulations are NEPA, SASA, the Policy on Home Education, Draft Regulations pertaining to home education and the BELA Bill.

We had several meetings. Members were requested to choose their area of interest for group work.

We use an Excel spreadsheet as a framework to be populated onwards.

The framework consists of the definition, purpose and scope, roles of the HOD, parents’ responsibility, application, registration, decline, cancellation, appeal, education program, curriculum, assessment, record keeping, and extramural activity.

There is no significant progress yet, and it is still too early to say what effect our participation will have on the outcome.

We do have several burning concerns regarding the NTT:

- 1) The National Education Policy Act does not make provision for the establishment of consultative bodies that the minister must consult when making regulation.
- 2) The NTT was established by a circular that was written in terms of the state of disaster.
- 3) Regulations must be written in terms of a law, however the original terms of reference state that the regulations must be written in terms of a policy. The newest version of the TOR no longer states it is written in terms of a policy.
- 4) The law in terms of which the regulations must be written does not exist yet.
- 5) The NTT does not operate according to a constitution.

Most (if not all!) of these points were raised in writing and/or at meetings from the beginning of the NTT.

Mr. Van der Eems will write a letter that combines all of this in one letter and then we will propose a way forward.

The lack of meaningful participation in making regulations can then be a major component of the NCOP campaign in parliament.

However, the most concerning issue is that despite promises from Mr. Ndlebe at the public hearings, regarding freedom of curriculum and assessment in accordance with it, the impression at the last meeting was that officials are adamant that assessment must be against the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) i.e., CAPS.

Education Council

My 3 year term on the council comes to an end this year. I chaired the committee on Home Education and Emerging Education Modalities.

The Education council is busy finalising their report to the minister that will be presented to him at our final meeting in October.

The education council amongst other things will recommend that more research is needed to understand Home education and Emerging Education Modalities.

The council conceded that a document regarding “A new regulatory framework for education in South Africa” may be presented in the report, but under my and Bouwe Van der Eems names, not as a recommendation from the council.

Meeting with Mr. William Jantjies, Director: Institutional Management and Governance

On 11 November 2022, Mr. Van der Eems and I met with Mr. Jantjies and several other top WCED officials, at his *urgent* request to discuss CHE’s comments and concerns submitted on the draft regulations for Independent schools.

At the meeting Mr. Van der Eems presented the concept of a new education landscape and how the current regulatory framework is unable to accommodate many educational modalities.

Mr. Jantjies asked that we arrange an urgent follow up meeting with independent/cottage schools. We attempted to schedule this meeting but unfortunately it never realised.

LILC

CHE is grateful for our partnership with the LILC. Together we learn and share ideas and are able to work together to strategise how to achieve our shared goals. Any interested home educators are welcome to join LILC if they agree to their mission statement.

Feedback on other activities:

Sport

Only 6 of our CHE athletes competed at the SACSSA National Athletics Meeting from 30 September to 1 October 2022. One of our athletes also qualified for the Sub-Youth Inter-provincial Championships on 26 November 2022 at Pilditch Stadium in Pretoria.

Due to a double booking at the athletics venue the SACSSA regional athletics Meeting was postponed and only took place on 11 March 2023 at Jan Kriel School in Kuilsriver. This unfortunately meant that 30 athletes had to withdraw due to the date change. A huge thank you to Rian Ueckermann who got stuck with the task to refund all these athletes.

CHE entered a team of 215 athletes for the Regional athletics meeting and 76 of those also competed at the SACSSA Provincial meeting in Mossel Bay on 15 April 2023. A group of homeschoolers from the Durbanville area entered on their own this year, since they train together. Although the number of athletes CHE entered are still lower than prior to the Covid pandemic, combined with the Durbanville group we are in fact back to pre-covid numbers.

For a second year CHE gave special awards to our athletes at the end of the Provincial Athletics meet. The Victor/Victrix Ludorum were based on the total points of an athlete for their best 4 events.

A fair number of CHE athletes qualified for the SACSSA's National meet in Pietermaritzburg, which takes place 28 to 30 September 2023. We wish them all the best.

There is also a SACSSA Invitational athletics meeting taking place on 16 September 2023 in Mossel Bay for which a small group of CHE athletes have entered.

CHE shares information on Western Province Cross Country and other sports opportunities with our CHE Athletics Telegram channel.

CHE honours Hein Johnson

Cape Home Educators is deeply saddened by the passing away of Hein Johnson from SACSSA on 21 July.

Hein was a pillar of strength to home educating and alternative education communities in creating sports opportunities for our children in the Western Cape for many years.

Since 2016 our athletes reaped the benefit of the athletics meetings that he organised, but even long before that he and his family have been involved in the CHE sports days.

We will remember Hein with a smile on his face, helping in every way possible. Hein's motto has been that his events were there for the athletes and giving them the best opportunity and support.

He always saw the silver lining in any situation and met any challenge with grace, believing that God would turn a challenge into an opportunity to shine His light.

Hein has created a legacy that will never be forgotten. We will try to build on it in the future and can only hope to meet his exceptional example.

Rest in peace, Hein. You will be greatly missed. Our prayers go out to his wife Erika, son Byron and the rest of his family. May God's peace surround you and carry you through this time of great loss.

Jannie Nel has taken over from Hein as the new WPCSSA regional coordinator.

Educational Expo

The 2022 Cape Home Education expo was held at the Stellensport centre, at The Woodmill, in Stellenbosch on Saturday the 1st of October 2022. The sports centre allowed for exhibits, the kids market and kids activities, everything under one roof which created a unique experience.

This was confirmed by the positive feedback which the organisers received from visitors and exhibitors alike. The kids market organised by Nicky Wesson was specifically a hit.

After the huge drop in number of visitors after Covid, the CHE expo committee and Kragdag focused on marketing the expo by putting up posters, organising a radio ad and selling tickets through Webtickets. There was a slight increase in numbers that shows that there is still a need for a physical expo.

The expo committee together with Kragdag decided to host another expo in 2023 in the southern suburbs. The last expo that took place in the southern suburbs was hosted in 2014 in Fish Hoek. The next expo is planned for Saturday the 14th of October at Church-on Main in Wynberg.

Book donation

CHE are very grateful to Leela Thomson for donating a box of books to us. We will distribute it at the upcoming home education Expo.

Website

The Cape Home Educators website had a facelift. The website updates that went along with it brought to light that we had much more subscribers than we previously thought. At present we have 796 confirmed subscribers and 194 unconfirmed subscribers.

Unfortunately due to email issues on our website, the confirmation emails could not be sent to new subscribers since 31 May, greatly contributing to the number of unconfirmed subscribers.

This issue also affects our ability to send out newsletters. This is an issue that will need to be addressed with urgency.

Resignations

We sadly say goodbye to Adam and Nicky Wesson and Heidi Loubser.

We are truly grateful for their hard work and commitment over the past years and we wish them all the best in their new season.

Conclusion and thanks

In conclusion I wish to convey my heartfelt gratitude to each committee member for gracefully contributing to our efforts to serve the home education community. Without each one of you CHE would not exist. Thank you Rian, our Treasurer, Debbie, our secretary and Expo coordinator, Lizelle our website and Facebook guru and sport coordinator, to Adam, Nicky and Heidi for always helping at the Expo, sport days and website, and to Jennifer for supporting me with our BELA Bill endeavours.

A very special thanks goes to the Pestalozzi Trust and Mr. Bouwe Van der Eems, Mr. Christopher Cordeiro, Mrs. Karin Van Oostrum and Mrs. Uda De Wet, who are always on standby to advise us and to keep us informed.

Thank you to every home educating parent and child who wrote submissions and stood up at the public hearings to fight for our children's educational freedom!

Thank you to Mrs. Marie Sukers for your encouragement during the public hearings and for your passionate support and to Mr. Bax Nodada and Ms. Van Zyl and Mr. Boshof for standing up for us in the PCBE BELA bill deliberations.

Thank you to our members who came to our AGM and to our members who support us and pray for us. May God bless each one of you.