

TESTIMONY ON HOUSE BILL 58

Hearing on Wednesday, May 3, 2017

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*NOTE: I am a life-long resident of Ohio and have voted in every election -- including FOR our school levy on May 2! I have been married 57 years (to the same man!) and have four children and twelve grandchildren; ten of them are still in school. I have a B.A. in Education and an M.A. in English. I taught for 15 years and have volunteered for 42.

When my granddaughter called four years ago to tell me she could not read the hand-written birthday card I sent her, I was shocked. She was in the third grade and should be able to write in cursive and read it. As a retired teacher, I felt sick. My first thought was that she could not read the United States Constitution (in its original form) as well as many other documents. She could not sign a letter or a driver's license or a petition or a check or a credit card. She had been robbed of something precious: her signature.

My daughter, whose three children go to school in Dublin, Ohio, told me, "Mom, none of my children have a signature." Think about that. Do you have a signature? When was the last time you signed something? I signed six different things yesterday. But our children can't do that -- unless they go to Catholic schools.

Now, I may be old fashioned and prejudiced because I taught composition and writing at Wright State University and Miami University branch in Middletown, but one of the things I tried to impress upon my students was that no matter what they did in life, writing and the ability to express their ideas was essential.

Writing is essential to development-- not only physical but mental development. In a 2012 study, researchers found that when five-year olds were shown letters that they had practiced writing by hand, they used brain regions known to be involved in the mastery of reading skills. This didn't happen when they typed. Writing by hand helps improve letter recognition which is the strongest predictor of reading success. (Karin James, PH.D at I.U.) Research also showed that putting pen to paper not only helps young children learn how to read, but it could also help adults become better writers and learn new concepts. A 2014 study reported that college students who took long hand notes answered conceptual questions about the material better than students who had typed their notes. (Melinda Wenner Moyer, "Write-On," Parade, Sept. 21, 2014)

Two reasons have been put forth as excuses for not teaching this skill: teachers don't have time, and computers will replace writing. Really? The "invention" of hand writing centuries ago was a HUGE break through for civilization. Need I explain the role writing played in communication

and preserving our history? Granted, we can use computers and technology to do much of this, but to take cursive out of the curriculum is a huge mistake. Remember when we took phonics out of reading? Remember when we thought open classrooms were the way to go? Remember when the new math was all the rage? (Many parents have not recuperated from that "experience" yet!) Remember when some education experts suggested we stop teaching history? And remember when we made schools spend an enormous amount of time and \$25 million on the Parcc tests?

Mistakes are made, but sometimes they can be remedied. This is one of them. Don't take this skill -- which does not take long to teach -- away from our students. And don't tell me they are taught key boarding instead. For two weeks in third grade? I took typing as a sophomore in high school for a whole year. And I must admit it was probably the best skill I developed in high school. I type a lot, but there are so many things that are better hand-written and so many times when a keyboard is not available -- or worse yet, is not working. I'm sure you have all been the "victim" of a computer break down. We are paralyzed. We need a back-up system. Hand-writing IS that back-up system.

Straying a bit from the topic, I fear all this technology is not only addictive, it is breaking down social interaction, spelling skills, sustained concentration, along with stealing time and who knows what else? We, as the care takers and teachers of our young children, should not put all our eggs in the technology basket. Technology can be a blessing, but it can also be a curse. Give our children the opportunity to create, to dream, to write.

We have already taken so many things from our children: God, discipline, morality, responsibility, self-esteem, respect for authority, and in some cases, love. Don't take this wonderful gift away from our children. Thank you.

P.S. I have yet to meet anyone who agrees with the decision to remove cursive writing from the curriculum, and quite a few people told me to share that opinion with all of you today!