

HCS HBs 2230 & 2978 -- INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS IN SCHOOLS

SPONSOR: Byrnes

COMMITTEE ACTION: Voted "Do Pass with HCS" by the Standing Committee on Elementary and Secondary Education by a vote of 18 to 1.

The following is a summary of the House Committee Substitute for HBs 2230 & 2978.

This bill creates the "Student Screen-Time Standards Act" and provides definitions for "instructional technology" and before the end of the 2027-28 school year, requires that school districts and charter schools have a policy on screen time and the use of instructional technology for students in grades Kindergarten through five.

The bill requires that schools limit the use of screen time and the use of instructional technology both during school hours and as assignments or on school devices after the school day. The policy must provide a process for parents to request information about limits on their child's screen time and instructional technology use and districts must use research, evidence, and information to develop the policy based on best practices.

This bill requires parental notification of the policy annually and schools must publish the board policy relating to the use of screen time and instructional technology on the district website.

This bill directs the Literacy Advisory Council under section 186.080 to provide school districts and the State Board of Education advice on the inclusion of instruction and assessment of cursive writing and reading including the development of a model policy on cursive.

The bill directs the Commissioner of Education to establish the "Framework on Classroom Use of Screens Council" or "FOCUS Council" that will consist of 12 to 15 members appointed by the Commissioner. The Council is directed to meet four times a year in the initial year and at least two times annually after that with the purpose of reviewing best practices regarding screen use and the use of technology in instruction and providing related policy provisions. The bill outlines best practices and policies that must be included and directs the council to submit a report containing the Council's actions and policy proposals to the State Board of Education, the Governor, and the Joint Committee

on Education on or before July 1, 2027 and updated every two years annually after that.

The following is a summary of the public testimony from the committee hearing. The testimony was based on the introduced version of the bill.

PROPOSERS: Supporters say that research indicates that the use of technology and screens in younger age groups can be harmful and schools are continuing to push more and more on students when the data indicates this is actually detrimental to their health and well-being. The use of 1 to 1 devices and technological learning from a computer is not biologically compatible and these companies are deliberately targeting children with addictive games that dampen creativity. Students are often distracted when they have a device in front of them and cannot focus on the instruction from the living teacher. This is a welcome bill that is much needed with a few additional local control levers and changes to allow teachers to teach.

Testifying in person for the bill were Representative Byrnes; Diane Dragan; ArmorVine; Vanessa Whittle; Maryam Mohammad Khani; Anne Schlafly; Candice Robb; and Missouri NEA.

Opposition: There was no opposition voiced to the Committee.

OTHERS: Others testifying on the bill say often the cause of a due process case for special needs students is the use of digital instruction in place of high quality direct instruction which the Federal laws require.

Testifying in person on the bill was Missouri Disability Empowerment Foundation.

Written testimony has been submitted for this bill. The full written testimony and witnesses testifying online can be found under Testimony on the bill page on the House website.