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Missouri Signals National Shift in Education: Lawmakers Move to Reduce Classroom Screen Time, Restore Books, and Reinstate Cursive Instruction

JEFFERSON CITY, Mo. – Missouri is emerging as a national leader in a growing movement to restore how children learn.

Following a high-impact hearing before the Joint Committee on Education (JCED), chaired by Representative Ed Lewis and Co-Chaired by Senator Jill Carter, lawmakers in the House are advancing House Bill 2230 and House Bill 2978 — the “Student Screen-Time Standards Act,” sponsored by Rep. Tricia Byrnes (District 63) and Rep. Marlene Terry (District 66) respectively. The legislation marks a decisive shift away from excessive screen-based instruction and toward a model grounded in science, literacy, and child development.

During the hearing, powerful testimony from a Harvard-trained physician and Springfield school board member underscored the urgency of the issue. Dr. Maryam Mohammadkhani was invited by the Missouri Joint Committee on Education (JCED) to further inform legislators and the public about the issues addressed by HB 2230/HB 2978. Drawing from decades of medical experience and a growing body of international research, she warned that the widespread use of screens in education is not only failing to improve outcomes but actively harming children’s development.

“The damage from screens to the physical, emotional, and social development of children is indisputable,” she told lawmakers.

She described a measurable decline in attention, memory, comprehension, and executive functioning tied to screen-heavy learning environments, alongside rising mental health

concerns and widening academic gaps. She further emphasized that learning through screens is fundamentally misaligned with how the human brain develops, explaining that “learning from a computer is not biologically compatible with the way we are designed.”

The testimony highlighted a critical distinction often overlooked in modern classrooms: while technology can be a useful tool, it is not an effective primary method for teaching foundational skills. In contrast, decades of neuroscience research show that handwriting — particularly cursive — activates broader and more complex brain networks than typing. Writing by hand strengthens memory, comprehension, and cognitive processing, while reading on paper consistently leads to deeper understanding and retention than reading on screens.

“Handwriting activates a broader network of brain regions involved in motor, sensory, and cognitive processing,” the physician explained, noting that these benefits are especially critical during early childhood development.

At its core, the bill signals a clear message to schools across Missouri and the nation: technology should support learning, not replace it.

The legislation requires school districts to adopt policies that limit classroom screen time, prioritize books and hands-on learning, increase transparency for parents, and reestablish evidence-based practices such as handwriting and cursive instruction. It also creates a statewide Framework on Classroom Use of Screens (FOCUS) Council to study the cognitive, behavioral, and academic effects of screen exposure and guide long-term policy.

Missouri lawmakers made clear that the bill is not about eliminating technology, but about restoring balance in the classroom. Rep. Ed Lewis, Chair of the Missouri Joint Committee on Education (JCED), emphasized that the state is taking an important first step in addressing a problem that educators and parents increasingly recognize.

“We are putting school districts on notice — Missouri is going to address screen time,” Lewis said. “This is an important bill in education, and it starts a necessary shift.”

Ranking members echoed that sentiment, emphasizing the need to bring educators, parents, and policymakers together in a thoughtful transition that reflects both urgency and practicality. Rep. Tricia Byrnes, the bill's sponsor, framed the legislation as a return to proven, science-backed learning methods that prioritize students' long-term success.

“This is about putting learning first again,” Byrnes said. “We are restoring books, handwriting, and human connection in the classroom — because that’s how children actually learn.”

She added that Missouri has a unique opportunity to lead on an issue gaining national attention as states across the country begin to reassess the role of screens in education amid declining literacy rates and growing concerns about student well-being.

Real-world results are already reinforcing the direction of the bill. School districts that have reduced screen time and reintroduced traditional instructional methods are reporting measurable improvements in student performance, particularly in literacy and comprehension. These outcomes align with international trends, as countries that previously embraced heavy classroom technology are now reversing course and returning to books and hands-on learning.

The legislation represents more than a policy change — it marks a cultural shift in how education is approached. It challenges the assumption that more technology automatically leads to better outcomes and instead centers education around how children actually develop, think, and learn.

As the bill advances, Missouri is sending a signal far beyond its borders: the future of education may depend not on more screens, but on rediscovering the fundamentals that built generations of strong readers, critical thinkers, and capable citizens.

HB 2230/HB 2978 passed out of the House on Monday, March 30th with a vote of 143-10. Senator Carter is the bill's handler in the Senate.