

MINUTES  
**HOUSE EDUCATION COMMITTEE**

**DATE:** Thursday, February 07, 2013

**TIME:** 9:00 A.M.

**PLACE:** Room EW41

**MEMBERS:** Chairman DeMordaunt, Vice Chairman Nielsen, Representatives Shepherd, Wills, Bateman, Boyle, Agidius, Clow, Gestrin, Harris, Horman, Mendive, VanOrden, Pence, Kloc, Ward-Engelking

**ABSENT/  
EXCUSED:** Rep. Boyle

**GUESTS:** Peter Wolheim, Ph.D; Harold Ott, Idaho Rural School Assn; Kathleen Wright and Tammie Odenbrett, Zaner-Bloser/Highlights for Children; Phil Homer, Idaho Assn of School Administrators; Rian Van Leaven, Idaho AFL-CIO; Camillea Wells, Idaho State Dept of Education; Clark Corbin, Idaho Education News; Robin Nethnge and Bert Marley, Idaho Education Assn; Ronalee Linsenmann and Steve Berch, citizens; Marilyn Whitney; State Board of Education

**Vice Chairman Nielsen** called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.

**MOTION:** **Rep. Kloc** made a motion to approve the minutes of February 1, 2013. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

**MOTION:** **Rep. Harris** made a motion to approve the minutes of February 4, 2013. **Motion carried by voice vote.**

**HCR 3:** **Rep. Bateman** presented **HCR 3**, the concurrent resolution that requests the State Board of Education commence rulemaking to provide cursive handwriting be taught in the public schools of Idaho. He reported he had received mail from all over the United States, written in cursive. Many respondents were concerned about grandchildren who could not read cursive. He said that with the passage of "No Child Left Behind" the youth are unable to write or read cursive well. He reported that young teachers who did not possess the skills to teach cursive were the least likely to embrace the cursive writing legislation. Rep. Bateman said Georgia and Indiana had recently included cursive writing back into the Common Core Standards

**Peter Wolheim, Ph.D**, Boise State University teacher emeritus, explained his background was in mass media and social change, philosophical perspectives of inquiry and communication. He said he would report on the research and not the bias that may exist. He clarified he was not a paid lobbyist for the pen and ink industry.

In relating the research to the committee, **Dr. Wolheim** said it was far easier for children to go from block writing to cursive. They cannot proceed the other direction successfully. He said cursive is unique because children connect letters. It is two-sided: detailed and spacial. He explained children who are trained in cursive "think about thinking" better and their hand, eye coordination is improved. He added children with developmental problems do better when learning cursive. Dr. Wolheim said 17 percent of student populations suffer from dyslexia but flourish in the cursive writing setting, as do the 10 percent of left handed students.

**Dr. Wolheim** related the esthetic value of cursive handwriting goes beyond making artistic letters, it binds time and space. He said the Internet binds space, handwriting binds both. He clarified the tying of handwriting to social proprieties and social stability. He said we want our students to maintain a sense of civility. He added that when his students text him they begin with "hi" or "yo." When they write him a letter, they begin: "Dear Dr. Wolheim."

In response to questions from the committee, **Dr. Wolheim** said when handwriting is reintroduced to the Common Core it is important, from the teacher's standpoint, to not make it burdensome. Incentives could be used. He noted that software has been developed that can scan handwriting and make it much more legible. He also noted that the breathing and flow when writing, becomes almost musical.

**Kathleen Wright**, Zaner-Bloser/Highlights for Children, National Product Manager, Handwriting, explained she holds seminars around the country explaining the research on the benefits of handwriting. She said she hears many concerns about children who cannot read cursive handwriting. She noted that reading of old handwritten documents, diaries and letters could become a lost art. She said when anyone writes something down, it is remembered longer. Also cursive writing helps all students, especially multicultural students, pay attention to all the letters in a word.

In response to questions from the committee regarding the most appropriate time to teach cursive handwriting, **Ms. Wright** explained when a child begins to read well, start cursive. Starting in third grade is an appropriate time and then continue up through the life span of the child. She said it needs to be practiced, but not more than 15 minutes of instruction a day. To further questions from the committee, Ms. Wright said students capture information better when it is written by hand and that when they cease cursive, students cannot capture complete thought as well, thus the presence of graduates who cannot spell, write a complete paragraph, or file comprehensive reports.

Responding to a question regarding brain research on handwriting, **Ms. Wright**, explained the research only shows what is happening in the brain while children are writing. There is no research to tell what is happening in the brain when they are not writing. She noted the proposed standard in Indiana and Georgia is to include cursive writing into the Common Core.

**Vice Chairman Nielsen** turned the gavel over to **Chairman DeMordaunt**.

In response to a question from the committee, **Ms. Wright** related that children will see the relevance of cursive writing when we celebrate what they do well. They can be encouraged to consider their audience and realize that their handwriting represents them when they are no longer there. She told of a national handwriting contest where 3,500 students entered and that a disabled student entry caused the sponsors to open up a separate category. She suggested enthusiasm be built into the instruction by using a smart board with a stylus for presentations and student practice, also on electronic tablets.

**Ronalee Linsenmann**, representing self, testified saying she was a supportive parent and emphasized the need to pass the legislation. She added the lost courtesy of writing thank you notes was part of society's problem of incivility. **Steve Berch**, representing self, asked the sponsor to clarify the intent of the legislation.

**Rep. Bateman** explained that cursive handwriting had been included in state standards until 2011, but was dropped with the adoption of the Common Core.

**Chairman DeMordaunt** explained that the Concurrent Resolution was a recommendation to the State Board of Education to act in a certain way.

**Mr. Berch** said the issue was one of priority. He said the music and art programs were also disappearing from schools curriculum. He encouraged the return of the five day school week.

**Rep. Bateman** closed debate on **HCR 2** by stating he was concerned if the matter was left to local control and if the state did not have a cursive handwriting standard, the important developmental skill of handwriting would be lost. He said the request for this legislation had come from the local level and that is was of grave concern to most parents and grandparents.

**MOTION:** **Rep. Wills** made a motion to send **HCR 2** to the floor with a **DO PASS** recommendation. **Motion carried by voice vote.** **Rep. Bateman** will sponsor the bill on the floor.

**ADJOURN:** There being no further business to come before the committee, the meeting adjourned at 10:00 a.m.

---

Representative DeMordaunt  
Chair

---

Jean Vance  
Secretary