

Pointers For Parents

The Writing's On The Wall: Poor Penmanship Has A Price

(NAPSA)—Even as schools are under pressure to improve students' math and reading proficiency, one important determinant of kids' futures is seeing less time in the classroom: handwriting.

According to research conducted by Vanderbilt University, as few as 10 minutes a day are spent on handwriting development from kindergarten to 3rd grade and almost no instruction is given after that time. Stretched teachers are simply running out of time to incorporate dedicated handwriting lessons, which has experts like Toni Schulken looking for new solutions.

"Handwriting is 50 percent of literacy, but children are seeing less and less formal handwriting instruction," says Schulken, a child occupational therapist who is dedicated to increasing writing literacy in America. "This gap leads to frustrated kids, stressed parents and discouraged teachers who often don't know how to help."

Whatever the source, failing to master penmanship has measurable repercussions. Steve Graham, who specializes in writing development at Vanderbilt University, says children without a solid handwriting foundation often have "trouble taking notes and difficulty keeping up in class."

Plus, experts say poor penmanship stretches past your own child's future. EducationWorld.com



Experts say there's a strong link between literacy and handwriting skills.

reports up to \$95 million in tax refunds aren't delivered correctly because of unreadable tax forms and, looking ahead, the health of one in 10 Americans could be endangered by their physician's poor penmanship.

These statistics are startling to today's leading source of handwriting development—busy parents. Not only do parents have to find the time to help with handwriting, many are struggling with how to properly teach it and looking for help when it comes to where to start.

To bridge the gap, Schulken helped develop Mead Writing Fundamentals, a line of 15 products meant to guide parents as they introduce and reinforce handwriting skills for their pre-K through 3rd-grade kids. The products are positioned in four stages, based on the development of the

child, and start before pencil hits paper with activities designed to build fine and perceptual motor skills instrumental for sound handwriting.

Stage one explores tasks like cutting and connecting dots that require eye-hand coordination. Stage two teaches motor patterns needed for forming capital letters, numbers and lowercase letters. Stage three helps students master writing words on traditional primary paper, while stage four addresses common issues such as inconsistent spacing, large letter size and difficulty adhering to margins.

"The idea is that each mastered skill builds on the next as children first tackle prewriting tasks and eventually build sound writing habits," explains Schulken.

Creative lessons, the use of color to aid focus and increase retention, helpful reminders for proper pencil grasp, and cues for paper stabilization are carried throughout the line.

For parents worried about their own child's chances of being accepted into a good college one day, such products couldn't come at a better time. Partly in an effort to encourage schools to stress handwriting and written expression skills, the College Board added a handwritten essay to the SAT in 2005.

For more information, visit www.mead.com.