

## Written Testimony

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*Educator, Mindful Tech Lessons*

Vermont Committee on Commerce and Economic Development

Good afternoon Chair Marcotte, Vice Chair Graning, and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to be here today and for your attention to this important issue.

My name is Jill Anderson. I am a veteran public school teacher with 20 years of experience, and I currently teach third grade in Westchester, New York. I am testifying from my classroom this afternoon, which feels especially meaningful given the topic before you.

I hold a masters degree in Educational Psychology. Over the course of my career, I have witnessed a dramatic increase in the amount of time students spend engaged on devices, especially since COVID, when one to one devices and ed tech platforms quickly became a classroom norm. Simultaneously, there have been significant changes in students' attention, emotional regulation, social development, independence, and ability to engage in pretend and creative play. These shifts did not happen overnight, but they have become increasingly difficult to ignore.

After reading **The Anxious Generation**, which connected what I was seeing daily with a growing body of research, I knew families needed more than awareness. That realization led me to create Mindful Tech Lessons, where I facilitate hands-on, in-person workshops for caregivers and educators with practical tools, strategies, and real books to support healthier technology practices at home. These workshops are intentionally designed around human engagement, collaboration, and discussion.

My goal is to educate and empower the adults in children's lives to make informed, developmentally appropriate decisions around technology in a world that is changing faster than our policies and systems often can.

Through this work, I came to another realization. These changes cannot happen only at home. Schools must also be selective and critical about the screen experiences we provide children during the school day.

What I am seeing now is a shift where many families who have intentionally avoided iPads at home are seeing their child's first exposure occur in kindergarten. An iPad is essentially an oversized iPhone, often filled with highly stimulating, gamified applications. It is not developmentally appropriate for young children to spend significant instructional time tapping and scrolling instead of squeezing, building, writing, turning pages, drawing, and playing.

The more programs and platforms students are exposed to at school, the more schools unintentionally signal to families that these products are educational, safe, and appropriate for home use. **Schools are not only educating children. We are also helping shape cultural norms.**

I have always taught in large, diverse districts where student needs vary widely. Educators want to do what is best for children. When presented with tools that promise differentiation, improved outcomes, or added support for high-need learners, it is understandable to be hopeful. The problem is that, in many cases, these tools are not delivering on those promises and are creating new challenges instead.

Many of these products are highly distracting and heavily gamified. Students spend time customizing avatars, rushing through tasks to earn badges, pretending to read books to mark them complete, or focusing on flashy rewards rather than comprehension. I have seen typing programs so gamified that children use one finger simply to unlock the next incentive, and coding programs that include unsafe chats or embedded marketing.

I am fortunate to teach in a district that does not mandate specific ed tech platforms or required usage minutes. However, ed tech shows up very differently across districts and even across classrooms. Parents are often unaware of how frequently devices are being used. While some districts require daily minutes on programs, others frame these tools as supplemental. A supplement, however, is only as strong as the core curriculum. When physical texts, manipulatives, and hands-on materials are lacking, teachers are more likely to rely on screens to fill those gaps.

We then need to ask some basic questions about function and purpose. Why are children practicing letter formation on screens instead of developing proper pencil grip on paper? Why are students playing math games alone on devices instead of collaborating with peers using physical materials? Why are children reading aloud to an app instead of to a teacher or classmate, or learning measurement on a screen instead of using real rulers and real objects?

These products are often replacing real books, decodable texts, math manipulatives, and hands-on learning experiences. As a result, many children are struggling to sustain attention and engage with longer, more complex text.

Regarding this bill, I believe holding these products to high standards is essential. There are simply too many apps and platforms for educators and districts to adequately vet. I served on an interview committee for a Director of Technology position in 2016, before one to one devices became widespread, and even then it was clear how complex and demanding this role is. These professionals must manage privacy compliance, data protection, IT systems, budgets, communications, and instructional needs simultaneously.

Not every district has the capacity or expertise to thoroughly vet every product, and even well-intentioned leaders can be influenced by aggressive marketing. When mistakes are made, an entire district of children is affected. I would urge that any group responsible for vetting products be free of conflicts of interest.

If fewer products meet strong criteria, districts will be encouraged to invest in higher quality curricula, collaborate more intentionally, and prioritize resources that do not require this level of oversight. That benefits students, educators, families, and schools.

Speaking as a parent, I strongly support this bill. I requested to opt my kindergarten child out of one to one iPad use, but the district refused, a concern echoed by many other families. I believe many teachers want to honor these requests but feel constrained by district-level decisions.

One of my greatest fears is that public schools will continue to lose students to families seeking more balanced, less screen-heavy educational environments. This is already happening. Many private, religious, and Montessori schools are intentionally tech light. Public schools are pillars of our communities, and we must protect them by ensuring they remain places where children can thrive.

Thank you for your time and for taking this issue seriously. I would be happy to answer any questions.