

Dear Editor,

I read Dr. Amy Lutz's recent opinion piece on communication methods for non-speaking autistic individuals with concern. Her characterization of letterboarding and related spelling modalities as anti-science or offering "false hope" overlooks both compelling personal outcomes and emerging research.

My own son has been letterboarding—and more recently keyboarding—for five years. Through this method, he openly communicates his thoughts, feelings, and ideas directly to my wife and me, as well as to many others. He is now attending high school and aspires to earn a PhD in physics. His work is his own and neither my wife nor I can comprehend the physics problems he is able to complete correctly. His progress has been nothing short of transformative.

While facilitated communication in its earlier forms raised valid concerns about authorship, newer studies challenge blanket dismissals. A 2020 eye-tracking study by Vikram Jaswal and colleagues, published in *Scientific Reports*, examined nine non-speaking autistic letterboard users and found that participants consistently fixated on the correct letters *before* pointing to them. Their speed, accuracy, and gaze patterns were consistent with independent authorship rather than real-time facilitator cueing.

Many non-speaking autistics also experience severe motor-planning difficulties (dyspraxia), not cognitive impairment. This is a subtype of autistics that Lutz wants to lock away as prisoners of their own dyspraxic bodies. The SPELLERS Method instead directly addresses these challenges by supporting purposeful movement, allowing individuals to bypass unreliable speech or fine-motor barriers.

Recently, living relatives of Helen Keller have publicly advocated for preserving access to spelling-based communication methods. They warn that overly restrictive policies risk silencing a new generation of potential "Helen Kellers."

I strongly urge Lutz—and anyone skeptical of these approaches—to spend time with a proficient speller before concluding that hundreds of thousands of non-speaking autistics should be denied this pathway. These individuals have distinct voices that deserve to be heard. We should support individualized evaluation, further rigorous research, and every promising tool that gives them the chance to communicate.

Sincerely,

Brian Hooker, PhD