

Date of Hearing: March 22, 2023

ASSEMBLY COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION
Al Muratsuchi, Chair
AB 446 (Quirk-Silva) – As Amended March 13, 2023

SUBJECT: Pupil instruction: handwriting

SUMMARY: Defines handwriting, in the course of study for grades 1 to 6, to include cursive and joined italics. Specifically, **this bill:**

- 1) Adds cursive and joined italics, in the appropriate grades, to the definition of handwriting in the course of study for grades 1 through 6.

EXISTING LAW:

- 1) Establishes the course of study for grades 1 through 6, to include English, including knowledge of, and appreciation for literature and the language, as well as the skills of speaking, reading, listening, spelling, handwriting, and composition. (Education Code (EC) 51210)
- 2) Requires the Superintendent of Public Instruction (SPI), the State Board of Education (SBE), and any other entity or individual designated by the Governor to participate in the Common Core State Standards Initiative consortium sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers or any associated or related interstate collaboration to jointly develop common high-quality standards or assessments aligned with the common set of standards. (EC 60605.7)
- 3) Establishes the Academic Content Standards Commission, with specified membership, and requires it to develop academic content standards in language arts and mathematics, of which at least 85% must be the common core academic standards developed by the consortium or interstate collaboration set forth in Section 60605.7. (EC 60605.8)
- 4) Encourages school districts to comply with the SBE's English Language and Arts (ELA) Writing Arts Strategies on cursive handwriting standards whereby pupils are expected to write fluidly and legibly. Encourages schools to teach methods of penmanship that may include, but are not limited to, the D'Nealian Method and the Palmer Method of penmanship. (EC 33042)

FISCAL EFFECT: This bill has been keyed a possible state-mandated local program by the Office of Legislative Counsel.

COMMENTS:

Need for the bill. According to the author, "As an elementary school teacher for over three decades, cursive writing was always an important part of our curriculum. Writing in cursive has multiple benefits, including better brain development, retention, and learning in children. Writing in cursive helps join the auditory and language centers of the brain. It is also beneficial as an adult; the ability to sign their name in cursive is important for future job applications, writing checks, signing medical forms, obtaining driver's licenses, and voting. However, whether students are taught cursive writing depends on where they attend school. Every child

should be exposed to learning as well as the benefits of cursive writing on their educational development."

Cursive and joined italics left out of national Common Core State Standards but added in California's standards. The Common Core State Standards, released in 2010, are a set of ELA and mathematics content standards intended to serve as consistent standards among the states. The consortium that developed the standards was sponsored by the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

States adopting the Common Core standards were required to adopt at least 85% of the standards. California used part of its "15% flexibility" to add cursive and joined italics to the state's standards.

Cursive and joined italics part of English Language Arts/English Language Development standards and curriculum framework. Cursive and joined italics are included in the ELA and English Language Development (ELD) content standards adopted by the State Board of Education (SBE) in 2010 and modified in 2013, in grades 3 and 4:

- Grade 3, Conventions of Standard English: "Write legibly in cursive or joined italics, allowing margins and correct spacing between letters in a word and words in a sentence."
- Grade 4, Conventions of Standard English: "Write fluidly and legibly in cursive or joined italics."

The ELA/ELD Curriculum Framework adopted by the SBE in 2014 states:

In grade 3, students, learn cursive (or joined italics) writing through instruction in letter formation, and connections (L.3.2j). They practice and refine their developing skill in authentic writing activities. Legible handwriting not only allow students to read their own work, but to read others' work. In grade 3, students also begin to acquire keyboarding skills (W.3.6); keyboarding is given more attention in grades four and five. Importantly, as noted in the grade-2 discussion, the more the mechanics of writing (that is printing, cursive, and keyboarding) become effortless, the more students can focus on developing and communicating their ideas.

Research confirms that teaching handwriting of some kind is worthwhile. The rest is unclear. Since at least 1922, elementary school children in North America have been taught print first, and then cursive writing in or around third grade. Historically, where print and cursive have been taught sequentially, this sequence has been considered more accessible to young children. (Schwellnus, 2012)

However, practices vary by country and have changed over time. Schools in some countries teach only cursive, some teach print and cursive simultaneously or sequentially, some do not teach cursive at all, and some leave the choice up to individual teachers:

There are still places where manuscript is taught, places where cursive handwriting is taught and places where both are taught. Morin, Bara, and Alamargot (2017) drew up a bit more detailed of an inventory and specified that teachers in many states in the U.S.A. and Mexico favor manuscript writing. Pedagogues from France teach writing in cursive. In certain provinces of Canada, in certain states in the U.S., in England, and in Australia,

children learn manuscript first and then cursive writing. The authors also mention that sometimes teachers have a choice as is the case in Quebec, Canada, for example. Since 2013, this Canadian province has relaxed its rules and allows schools that wish to do so to choose only cursive or only manuscript (MELS, 2013). Semeraro, Coppola, Cassibba, Lucangeli, and Weng (2019) put forward the fact that Italian children generally learn manuscript writing and cursive simultaneously. (Pullido, 2022)

Two major meta analyses of research on print and cursive handwriting have been published since 2012 (Schwellnus, 2012; Pullido, 2022) which attempt to answer some basic questions about the efficacy of different handwriting instruction methods, including which kind of handwriting (print – also known as manuscript – or cursive, or both) should be taught to students. In total, these reviews include analysis of 110 studies conducted between 1968 and 2021 which met their inclusion criteria. (Schwellnus, 2012)

Broadly speaking, they conclude the following with respect to the effects of handwriting instruction:

- Teaching handwriting of some kind is worthwhile. “One irrefutable fact that has been established is that handwriting is a motor skill and, as such, requires practice both to learn and to improve (Hoy et al., 2011). With evidence supporting the link between learning to form letters by hand and processing shapes and letters, it would also appear that some form of handwriting is beneficial for children to learn even with the advances in technology.” (Schwellnus, 2012)

“Contemporary data shows us that the predictive effect exists from kindergarten onward: the characteristics of graphomotor strokes in kindergarten allow researchers to predict the level of reading at the end of the first grade (Malpique, Pino Pasternak, & Roberto, 2020). Even if contradictory data also exists (Pritchard et al., 2020, for example, did not observe this when they noticed a link between graphomotor skills in kindergarten and the first grade of elementary school), a meta-analysis (Feng, Lindner, Ji, & Joshi, 2019) shows that this effect is very strong overall.” (Pullido, 2022)

- Limited evidence suggests that the sequence of handwriting instruction has an effect on reading proficiency. “Manuscript was introduced first as it was thought to be easier to learn and would encourage reading (Burns, 1968). However, Otto and Rarick (1969), Duvall (1985), and Karlsdottir (1996) found that there is no difference in children’s reading skill regardless of whether manuscript or disjoined cursive is taught.” (Schwellnus, 2012).

“Morin, Lavoie, and Montésinos-Gelet (2012) compared the skills of second-grade students who learned to write in cursive to those students who learned manuscript in first grade and cursive in second grade. At the end of the second grade, students who learned to write in cursive were the slowest in writing speed, but at the same time, they were better in lexical spelling and in syntax. In the task of production of a summary of a story that they had heard, the summaries produced had comparable characteristics from one group to another.

Bara, Morin, Alamargot, and Bosse (2016) compared, for their part, the skills of letter naming, identification of the sounds of letters, and reading of words in students who had

learned to write 1) in manuscript 2) in cursive 3) in manuscript and subsequently in cursive. The students of groups who learned manuscript writing had better knowledge of letters than those who had learned cursive. The students who learned both manuscript and cursive were better in reading than the others.

Semeraro et al. (2019) compared the development of skills in reading and in writing of two groups of Italian students. In the first group, students had learned straightaway to write in cursive. In the second one, the students had learned to write in manuscript and in cursive at the same time. Results of this study showed that the students who learned manuscript and cursive at the same time were better in reading comprehension, but they were worse at reading accuracy. Furthermore, children who learned cursive and manuscript scored lower in reading fluency. The fact that comprehension is better while decoding seems worse is surprising and difficult to interpret due to a lack of information regarding the test used to assess reading comprehension in this research. From the writing standpoint, children who learned manuscript and cursive had better results in the measure of accuracy of three spelling tasks: spelling for words, pseudowords and text.” (Pullido, 2022)

- Whether print, cursive, or both, should be taught, remains unclear. “Based on current literature, we cannot yet say definitively whether cursive or manuscript writing is best for children when first learning to write. Whether both are necessary is also questionable based upon some European and Australian models of instruction.” (Schwellnus, 2012)

“At the end of this analysis, is it possible to suggest that manuscript, cursive, or both should be taught? The answer to this question is unclear in the current state of knowledge. Nevertheless, the studies reviewed suggest that learning manuscript is faster, so in a context where quick results are desired, this may be the most appropriate choice. On the other hand, children who learn to write in cursive need a little more time to write legibly, but they are distinguished in terms of syntax and lexicon. Thus, in languages where spelling is not transparent, and which have a complex syntax, this choice may be worth considering. Finally, learning both manuscript and cursive is the choice that requires more effort on the part of children, so it’s probably not the first choice to consider. But this choice seems to have a positive impact on reading skills.” (Pullido, 2022)

Arguments in support. The Los Angeles County Office of Education writes, “Researchers have long studied the effects and links between handwriting and reading development. There are clear connections between the linguistic processes of reading and the motor process of handwriting, which keyboarding skills do not replicate. The mechanics of handwriting follows a sequence initiated in the brain, similar to reading - the sound is heard and processed, a letter attached and visualized, then translated into a shape on a page and produced with motor skills that reinforce the direction of lines and shapes to form letters. These letters then connect to form words and meaning is attached. Handwriting not only activates the literacy regions of the brain, it also reinforces print awareness skills like visual tracking, reading left to right, as well as capitalization and punctuation rules. It supports spelling and vocabulary acquisition, which boosts fluency in reading. It also helps with retention of linguistic patterns as well as content learning. Most students with reading difficulties also struggle with handwriting and writing structures in general. As a general rule, reading and writing go hand in hand, and the ability to actually handwrite is key in the development of young learners. AB 446 would require

handwriting instruction in cursive or joined italics to be standard across our state. Every student will be taught this important skill no matter what city, county or school district a student resides in.”

Related legislation. AB 742 (Quirk-Silva) of the 2017-18 Session would have required that instruction in the skill of handwriting required as part of the adopted course of study for grades 1 to 6 include instruction in cursive or joined italics in grades 2 through 5. This bill was held in the Assembly Appropriations Committee.

SB 1770 (Burton), Chapter 508, Statutes of 2002, encourages school districts to comply with the SBE’s ELA Writing Arts Strategies on cursive handwriting standards whereby pupils are expected to write fluidly and legibly, and encourages school districts to teach methods of penmanship that may include, but are not limited to, the D’Nealian Method and the Palmer Method of penmanship.

REGISTERED SUPPORT / OPPOSITION:

Support

Los Angeles County Office of Education
Two individuals

Opposition

None on file

Analysis Prepared by: Tanya Lieberman / ED. / (916) 319-2087