

**Testimony on Assembly Bill 459**  
**The Cursive Bill**  
*Assembly Committee on State Affairs*  
225 NW

Hello, Chairman Swearingen and Members of the Committee. Thank you for holding a hearing today on Assembly Bill 459, a bill that will guarantee that all Wisconsin students are able to write in cursive.

As you have seen, there has been much news on the state of education not only in Wisconsin. Wisconsin's reading scores have been declining steadily, and, as Chair of the Education Committee, I have heard many heartbreaking stories from parents of students and students themselves who are unable to effectively read, who struggle in school, and who want tools to be able to learn more efficiently and successfully.

Surprisingly to many, cursive writing can lend a hand in the process of improving reading. This bill isn't just about nostalgia of being able to read grandma's letters and primary source historical documents.

While education has many goals, I would contend that one of the most important is to maximize the potential of our minds. Teaching kids how to think happens by activating and creating neurological pathways connecting the different parts of our brains. Cursive writing actually trains the brain to integrate visual and tactile information and fine motor dexterity. Astonishingly, printing and typing do not stimulate the synchronicity between the right and left hemispheres of the brain, but cursive writing does. Cursive requires different muscles and uses a different part of the brain than regular writing. Studies have also shown that memory recall of the content of writing performed using cursive surpasses that of the typed word. On top of all of this, cursive can help grade students develop their motor skills.

Interestingly victims of traumatic brain injuries and even older patients with neurological impairments and diseases seem to be helped in recreating these mental pathways through the written word.

Many students with learning disabilities, specifically dyslexia, struggle with writing in print. Studies have shown that cursive comes more natural to these students as they are able to write in a 'flow' way with the mind-body connection and with a different part of the brain, and cursive can improve learning outcomes.

Fifteen states now require students to be proficient in cursive. The most recent state to pass legislation regarding cursive proficiency, Ohio, did so in a very bipartisan manner. The legislation passed their State House of Representatives 90-4 and the State Senate 27-2.

As we look at ways to better education in the State of Wisconsin, we want to look at many different areas, including where we can get the best bang for our taxpayer dollars. Cursive is something that yields positive results in the brains of our students and their learning outcomes.

As Chair of the Senate Education Committee and Chair of the Assembly Education Committee, Senator Olsen and I both feel strongly in giving students every chance to be successful in school. Cursive is one hugely beneficial and, honestly, fairly easy tool that can be enormously beneficial to Wisconsin students.

The Wisconsin Property Taxpayers and Decoding Dyslexia of Wisconsin are both in support of this legislation, and you will hear from many others coming after me who are also in support of being able to read and write in cursive.

Thank you.

- Rep. Jeremy Thiesfeldt



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## Luther S. Olsen

State Senator  
14th District

**TO:** *Assembly Committee on State Affairs*  
**FROM:** *Senator Luther Olsen*  
**DATE:** *Wednesday, November 6, 2019*  
**SUBJECT:** *Testimony for Assembly Bill 459*

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*Thank you Chairman Swearingen and members of the Assembly Committee on State Affairs for holding a hearing and allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 459 (AB 459).*

*This past spring I gave a speech at my high school reunion where I discussed just how much has changed since we graduated. One of the things I joked about with my classmates was that our generation has the ability to write in a secret code as kids today are unable to read cursive. As technology has continued to evolve many schools now incorporate keyboarding and sometimes even coding into their requirements, but cursive has slowly faded out of the curriculum. While it is important that students learn about technology and are proficient in typing, it is also important that they are able to do the basics including being able to sign their name.*

*Learning how to write in cursive has a number of benefits as it helps to train different parts of the brain than typing does and it helps with fine motor skills. Cursive has also been suggested to be a good tool for treatment plans for those who struggle with dyslexia.*

*This bill will require the state superintendent of public instruction to incorporate cursive writing into the model academic standards for English language arts. It will also require a school board, independent charter school, and private schools that participate in the choice program to include cursive writing in its curriculum. While I agree that everyone needs to learn how to type I also believe that students would benefit from learning cursive.*

*Again, thank you for holding a hearing today and I ask for your support on Assembly Bill 459.*

Name: EJAN  
Date: 2/6/2010

~~WORLD OF WADDO STAP~~

1. TAG

8. ~~STAP~~

2. DIT

9. ADAY

3. HETS

10. ~~STAP~~ MINE

4. CFEY

11. LUCK

5. SHAD

12. MICK

6. SHAP

13. TRASH

7. UMBIRD

14. HOSE

15. ME

**Sentences:**

1. THE HAD HAD ME PENSI H H

2. CAN TAKE UP BY THE BY  
STEP

Name: EIAN

Date: 2/5 2010

~~Handwritten scribbles and crossed-out words at the top of the page.~~

o, th, un, d, e, l, sh, p, t, u, r, b, non, a, wh, o  
f, i, m, v, i, z, c, k, ck

1. ~~rag~~ rag

8. ~~grun~~ grunt

2. ~~pit~~ pit

9. ~~admit~~ admit

3. ~~huts~~ huts

10. ~~mine~~ mine

4. ~~chess~~ chess

11. ~~luck~~ luck

5. ~~shop~~ shop

12. ~~milk~~ milk

6. ~~slap~~ slap

13. ~~thrash~~ thrash

7. ~~unbend~~ unbend

14. ~~hose~~ hose

15. ~~me~~ me

Sentences:

1. ~~the lad had five pens in the box~~

The lad had five pens in the box.

2. ~~can Jane jump up the big step?~~

Can Jane jump up the big step?



**Good afternoon, Chairman Swearingen and Committee Members, thank you for the opportunity to testify today on Assembly Bill 459. My name is Nancy Honadel and I am a member of the General Federation of Women's Clubs International with 81,000 women volunteers. But today I am representing GFWC-Wisconsin as the cursive writing committee co-chairman. We are proud to have clubs in every one of the 72 Wisconsin counties. Two years ago, we drafted a resolution to reinstate cursive writing in our Wisconsin schools – it passed on the district level and was presented at the GFWC-WI state convention in May of 2018 where it passed overwhelmingly.**

**We wish to thank Rep. Thiesfeldt and his co-sponsors for drafting and presenting AB459 and we encourage passage.**

**Our research has found that at least 21 states have passed new bills requiring cursive writing and there are several states with pending legislation. Surprisingly New York City with 1.1 million students is also requiring students to learn cursive in the third grade.**

**I have been mentioning our journey to everyone I meet – and their faces light up and they say “Thank Goodness you are doing something about it”. But in the interest of fairness, I did have one man say “Why bother?”.**

**Why bother, indeed! We are bothering because our children are missing a valuable tool in their life's work. Professional researchers have found that handwritten notes are important because we are synthesizing the information as we are writing it. Linking letters together into word units also helps a student learn to spell words. And often cursive is faster than printing so a student's hand can keep up with their thoughts.**

**Based on our research, these are the reasons we recommend passage of the bill so our Wisconsin students have the opportunity to write in cursive:**

- 1. Cursive gets the entire brain working**
- 2. Cursive may help improve motor control**
- 3. Cursive helps you retain more information**
- 4. Cursive makes you a better speller**
- 5. Cursive helps you focus on content**
- 6. Cursive helps students with dyslexia**
- 7. Cursive gives the student a legal signature**
- 8. And last, but not least, it allows kids to read letters from Grandma!**

**In summary, our members recommend passage of this Bill AB459 so that when these students are 18 years of age, they can sign your nomination papers properly.**

**THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION**

**Nancy Honadel**



Mrs. Nancy Honadel  
7141 S. Beachwood Ct.  
Franklin, WI 53132

*apple.nancy.2015@att.net*

*414-529-0196*



### CURSIVE WRITING

Thank you Ch. Swearingen and Committee Members

I and my fellow WOMAN'S CLUB members support AB459 and SB 414 pertaining to Cursive Writing.

We support this bill because you have a group of students, ie our children and grandchildren who cannot read a simple thank you note, much less the Constitution.

Cursive Writing helps people Integrate Knowledge,

Lacking fluency in handwriting causes difficulty in composition. The relationship between Handwriting and composition quality is even seen on MRI's.

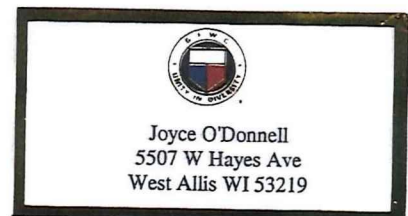
We use the hand and brain differently when writing than typing.

Handwriting uses more of your brain. The brain has to develop "functional specialization" Integrated thinking, movement, and sensation.

IT KEEPS OUR BRAIN ACTIVE

I have had a high school student tell me he had to ask an older friend to translate the cursive written document for him.

*Joyce O'Donnell*





# GFWC - WISCONSIN, INC.

*A Member Organization of...*



**GENERAL FEDERATION  
of WOMEN'S CLUBS**

*A 501 (c) (3) Charitable Organization*

May 16, 2019

State Representative Robin Vos  
Post Office Box 8953  
Madison, WI 53708

Dear Sir,

It is my great pleasure as the 2018-2020 President of the General Federation of Women's Clubs – Wisconsin, Inc. (GFWC-WI) to represent 50 state-wide clubs with 1,649 members. I'd like to formally register our state organization's endorsement of the Reinstatement of Cursive Writing in the Wisconsin Public School System Curriculum.

GFWC Wisconsin delegates overwhelmingly supported a resolution that was presented at our Annual State Convention on May 5, 2018 in Brown Deer, WI.

The resolution reads as follows:

“Resolved, the General Federation of Women's Clubs-Wisconsin supports the reinstatement of cursive handwriting instruction in the Wisconsin Department of Education public school curriculum.” Clubs are currently in the process of working within their local communities to gain additional support for this important project.

In addition to this endorsement letter, you are receiving several other supporting documents which our organization believes justifies this request to move our resolution to the appropriate state legislative committee for further action.

I look forward to a favorable outcome and that you will help our organization persuade the State Legislature to reinstate cursive handwriting instruction in Wisconsin's public schools.

Please feel free to contact the chairman of this important legislative project, Nancy Honadel, if you have any questions or require further information from GFWC Wisconsin.

Sincerely,

Deb Brossard  
GFWC-WI State President, 2018-2020

GFWC-WI 2018-2020 President  
Deb Brossard

9386 South Shore Road

Harshaw, WI 54529



Perhaps the strongest argument for the retention of cursive is that it is, or at least can be, beautiful. If you have forgotten this, take a look at Magna Carta, the US Constitution, and the Bill of Rights. Text typed on a computer is not beautiful because it is not distinctive

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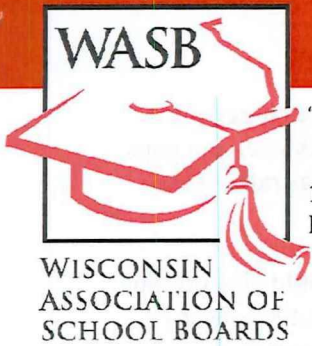
7-53126

Someday  
we old folks  
will use cursive  
writing as a

Secret

Code!





"Leadership in Public School Governance"

JOHN H. ASHLEY, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

122 W. WASHINGTON AVENUE, MADISON, WI 53703  
PHONE: 608-257-2622 FAX: 608-257-8386

TO: Members, Assembly Committee on State Affairs  
FROM: Dan Rossmiller, WASB Government Relations Director  
DATE: November 6, 2019  
RE: OPPOSITION to ASSEMBLY BILL 459, incorporating cursive writing into the state model English language arts standards and requiring cursive writing in elementary grades.

The Wisconsin Association of School Boards (WASB) is a voluntary membership association representing all 421 of Wisconsin's locally elected public school boards.

During each legislative session numerous bills are introduced to impose curricular mandates on schools. We generally oppose those bills when they either impose unfunded mandates on local school districts or attempt to micromanage decisions best left to local board discretion.

The WASB opposes Assembly Bill 459 based on our member-approved resolutions. One of these, WASB Resolution 3.20, states (in pertinent part): "The WASB opposes the implementation of any legislative mandates or administrative rules applicable to public school districts affecting the delivery, content or conduct of education, programming or support services unless they come with a legislative commitment by the state or federal government to permanently fund 100 percent of the actual cost or can be implemented at no cost."

The WASB also supports local school board control of curricular decisions. In that regard, this bill raises questions about the appropriate level of specificity of state standards, and about the lack of evidence showing the relative value of different amounts of instruction in cursive writing to overall student success. The question of how much instruction in cursive writing is enough and how much students should receive strikes us as one that is appropriately suited to local board decision making.

Do we argue that the Legislature lacks authority to impose such curricular mandates? No.

We recognize that public education is a fundamental responsibility of the state and that establishing goals and expectations is a necessary and proper complement to the state's financial contribution to public education. You, as legislators, can make this change should you choose to do so. The question is should you do so and, if so, why?

Do we question the wisdom of imposing a curricular mandate in the case of cursive writing? Yes.

In a world that is increasingly moving away from paper communications toward digital and electronic communications, we question the value of spending a significant portion of instructional time in third or fourth grade on cursive writing. Educators know that achieving mastery of cursive writing can take up an enormous amount of instructional time.

Given that some legislators, including one of the main authors of Assembly Bill 459, have questioned our lack of progress as a state toward improving student academic achievement and narrowing achievement gaps, this bill raises serious questions about whether schools should be spending time on other things rather than having students learn and practice cursive writing and what those things are.

This bill should force you to ask the question: what should schools emphasize in 2019? It should also prompt the related question: if this bill passes, how much cursive writing mastery will be enough to satisfy those of you who want to ensure cursive is taught and tested? Does a four-week unit suffice, does a quarter or semester suffice or is a whole year needed?

We note that section 118.01(2), Wis. Stats., sets forth a number of state-mandated educational goals applicable to school districts. Cursive writing has never been explicitly mentioned among those goals and we question what has changed that now requires that it be explicitly mentioned.

Section 118.01 (2)(a)1. States that:

... “each school board shall provide an instructional program designed to give pupils:

**1.** Basic skills, including the ability to read, write, spell, perform basic arithmetical calculations, learn by reading and listening and communicate by writing and speaking.

In addition to the goals set forth in statute, state-level and local-level academic standards attempt to identify the most essential and fundamental aspects of student learning, but they do not attempt to describe all that can or should be taught or precisely how instruction should be delivered. Further, the adoption of general academic standards in no way prevents adjustments in programs, curriculum, or individual learning goals or activities for students who have exceptional educational needs and interests, such as students with disabilities, students with dyslexia, English learners, and gifted students.

The state has also established state-level academic standards. These academic standards specify what students should know and be able to do, what they might be asked to do to give evidence of standards, and how well they must perform. They include content, performance, and proficiency standards.

- Content standards refer to what students should know and be able to do.
- Performance standards tell how students will show that they are meeting a standard.
- Proficiency standards indicate how well students must perform.

State law (see Section [118.30\(1g\)\(a\)1.](#), Wis. Stats.), expressly requires all school boards to adopt local-level academic standards in mathematics, science, reading and writing (i.e., English/language arts), and geography and history (i.e., social studies).

Neither the state-level academic standards nor the locally mandated school district-level academic standards currently make any explicit reference to cursive writing or, for that matter, the manner in which students are to be instructed regarding the mechanical act of putting pen or pencil to paper.

Wisconsin’s initial model academic standards were adopted in 1998 through a joint effort of the Governor (Tommy Thompson) and the State Superintendent (John Benson). At that time, Republicans controlled the Governor’s office and the state Assembly and Democrats controlled the state Senate.

The model state academic standards for English language arts adopted at that time included standards for writing, but they were focused on the content of writing not the manner in which handwriting is taught. This makes perfect sense since all communication, whether spoken or written, has content.

Those 1998 standards made no mention of handwriting or the manner in which students put pencil to paper, whether in the form of cursive writing, or printing (or manuscript writing as it is often called). This was left up to local school boards to decide. Even back 21 years ago, the state standards adopted recognized that new ways of communicating digitally were becoming more prevalent and set forward a goal that by end of fourth grade students will be able to “Use a variety of writing technologies, including pen and paper as well as computers.”

As the introduction and overview to those 1998 standards also made clear:

The importance of Statewide academic standards in mathematics, English language arts, science, and social studies is that they determine the scope of statewide testing. While these standards are much broader in content than any single Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) test, they do describe the range of knowledge and skills that may appear on the tests.

Question: How is a computerized state assessment going to test students for proficiency in cursive writing?

An overview of the English language arts standards adopted in 1998 puts the standards into perspective. It states:

Students listen, read, speak, write, use language, and enjoy literature at all levels and grades. The difficulty of the materials, the complexity of what students do with them, and the sophistication of their skills change as they grow older. In practice, teachers build on what students have already achieved at one level to help them meet higher standards at the next level.

The components of English language arts standards are inter-related. To use media, one must read or listen. To write, one must acquire knowledge by reading, listening, and viewing. To do research, one must read. To communicate in any form, one must know how the language works. To meet any single performance standard, students must achieve a level of proficiency in more than one content standard.

It strikes us that this statement articulates what developmental standards related to English language arts should be about. We should be focused on ensuring that students are effective communicators, regardless of whether they are communicating in spoken, handwritten or typed formats. Regardless of what the standards say, schools can always adjust individual instruction to meet individual needs. However, to the extent the state issues “one-size-fits-all” mandates this can become more challenging.

In summary, we believe that the decision to teach or not teach cursive writing is best made by local school boards in consideration of local values and preferences in each community. We note that many school districts provide instruction in cursive writing. We also note that many school districts do not require instruction in cursive writing or require only minimal instruction in cursive writing. This includes some districts that are regarded as high performing districts based on the state’s school report cards.

Clearly, the state regards these districts and boards as capable of managing their affairs with respect to overall student performance. We ask: Why is the state now stepping in and attempting to micromanage curriculum decisions in those and other districts? And why among all the concerns being expressed about student achievement is mandating cursive writing among the bill’s authors’ top educational priorities?

For all of the above reasons, the WASB opposes Assembly Bill 459.

Assembly Committee on State Affairs  
November 6, 2019

### Statement of Information on Assembly Bill 459

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Thank you Chairman Swearingen and members of the committee for the opportunity to provide information regarding 2019 Assembly Bill 459 (AB 459). This bill requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to incorporate cursive writing into the model academic standards for English language arts. This bill also requires a school board, independent charter school, and private school participating in a parental choice program to include cursive writing in its curriculum for the elementary grades. The bill further requires that each elementary school curriculum include the objective that pupils be able to write legibly in cursive by the end of fifth grade.

#### **Background**

The State Superintendent adopts state standards for English language arts. Local school districts determine whether they will adopt state standards, what curriculum they will use, and if additional assessments, beyond state assessments, will be used.

The Academic Standards Review Council is the group that advises the State Superintendent on the adoption of standards. It is appointed by the State Superintendent. Legislative members, however, are requested from the leaders of the majority and minority parties in both the State Senate and the Assembly. Current legislative members include Senator Luther Olsen, Senator Chris Larson, and Representative Dave Considine. A list of the full membership is attached.

The DPI has a comprehensive process for reviewing and revising academic standards. The process begins with a notice of intent to review an academic area with an associated public comment period. The State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council then examines those comments and recommends to the State Superintendent whether to revise or develop standards in that academic area. Based on that recommendation the State Superintendent determines whether or not to pursue a revision or development process. Following this, a state writing committee is formed to work on writing specific standards for all grade levels. That draft is then made available for public review and comment. That public comment is provided to the State Superintendent's Academic Standards Review Council to determine if further revisions need to be made to the proposed standards and then makes a recommendation to the State Superintendent. The State Superintendent then determines adoption of the standards.

Wisconsin's Standards for English Language Arts are currently under review for revision. A draft of proposed standards will be available for public comment early next year.

#### **Analysis**

Teaching cursive writing provides learners with another way, in addition to print, keyboarding, or drawing, which are all mentioned in Wisconsin's Standards for English Language Arts, to capture and communicate thinking.

Given that local school boards currently determine curriculum, AB 459 would overwrite that authority in this area by placing a curricular requirement on schools and districts by requiring cursive to be part of each district's sequential curriculum plan.

This bill introduces the first statutory requirement regarding inclusion of a specific skill or knowledge into Wisconsin Standards for English Language Arts.

The bill does not include funding for curriculum, materials, or professional learning for educators. Teaching cursive writing would require time for instruction and practice resulting in less time for other instruction.

As written, the bill applies to all students. The fine motor skills required for cursive writing may be challenging for some students, including students with Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), who may need extra supports.



## State Superintendent's Standards Review Council

- Barbara Bales, Director of Strategic Initiatives and Educational Innovation - University of Wisconsin System
- Mike Beighley, District Administrator - Whitehall School District
- Mariana Castro, Deputy Director, Wisconsin Center for Education Research, University of Wisconsin-Madison
- Representative Dave Considine, D-Baraboo - Wisconsin State Assembly
- D. Rose Coppins, Principal, Keefe Avenue School, Milwaukee Public Schools
- Jill Gaskell of Blanchardville - Member, Pecatonica School Board
- Barbara Gransee, Director of Pupil Services and Special Education - Adams-Friendship School District
- Anne Heck, Principal - Lake Geneva Middle School
- Jenni Hofschulte of Milwaukee, Parent - Milwaukee Public Schools
- Brian Jackson, President - Wisconsin Indian Education Association
- Dean Kaminski – Principal - Prairie Elementary School, Waunakee Community School District
- Howard Kruschke of Roberts - President, St. Croix Central School Board
- Senator Chris Larson, D-Milwaukee - Wisconsin State Senate
- Heather Mielke of Elkhorn - Math Teacher - Burlington High School
- Senator Luther Olsen, R-Ripon - Wisconsin State Senate
- Desiree Pointer Mace, Professor - Alverno College
- Chris Reader, Director of Health and Human Resources - Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce
- Lisa Sanderfoot of De Pere, Computer and Information Science Teacher - Valley View Elementary School, Ashwaubenon
- Chrystal Seeley-Schreck, Associate Vice-President, Office of Instructional Services, Wisconsin Technical College System
- Amy Vesperman, Superintendent and Director of Curriculum and Instruction, Plum City School District
- Pam Yoder, District Administrator, Belleville School District

John Johnson, Ex Officio Chair, Director, Literacy and Mathematics,  
Department of Public Instruction