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Assembly Bill 3: Incorporating Cursive Writing into the State Model English Language Arts Standards and Requiring Cursive Writing in Elementary Grades

Good morning Chairman Kitchens and members of the committee. I appreciate the opportunity to speak on Assembly Bill 3 and its potential impact on ensuring that all Wisconsin students acquire proficiency in cursive writing.

While education encompasses various goals, I firmly believe that maximizing the potential of our minds ranks among the most crucial. The ability to think critically and creatively is fostered by activating neurological pathways that connect different parts of our brains. Cursive writing uniquely contributes to this process by training the brain to integrate visual and tactile information, along with fine motor dexterity. Unlike printing and typing, cursive stimulates the right and left parts of the brain, offering a comprehensive cognitive exercise.

Memory recall of content written in cursive surpasses that of typed words. The distinct muscular engagement and brain activation involved in cursive writing contribute to enhanced memory retention. Additionally, cursive writing aids in the development of motor skills, benefiting students across grade levels.

For students with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia, cursive writing emerges as a supportive tool. Many struggle with writing in print, and cursive, with its 'flow' style and mind-body connection, often feels more natural to these students. The utilization of different brain regions during cursive writing has been linked to improved learning outcomes.

Today, 24* states have recognized the importance of cursive proficiency, incorporating it into their educational standards. Less than 10 years ago, only 14 states had this requirement. Currently in Wisconsin, the inclusion of cursive instruction varies by district and individual schools.

In conclusion, I strongly advocate for giving Wisconsin students every opportunity to succeed in school. Cursive writing, a relatively simple yet highly beneficial tool, can play a pivotal role in achieving this goal. Thank you for considering the positive impact of AB 3.

*States that require cursive be taught: Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, California, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Illinois, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

Respectfully submitted,

Representative Paul Melotik
22nd Assembly District



AB 3/SB 13 Incorporating Cursive into State Curriculum

Testimony of Senator Steve Nass

Assembly Committee on Education

February 6, 2025 • 417 North (GAR), State Capitol

Thank you, Chairman and committee members for allowing me to testify in support of Assembly Bill 3. This legislation requires the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) to incorporate cursive writing into the model academic standards for English language arts.

On June 2nd 2010, then State Superintendent Tony Evers “formally adopted the common core State Standards for Mathematics and English Language Arts” in Wisconsin and argued that these new standards would help students prepare for college and excel in education.ⁱ

While Common Core changed many requirements, it specifically removed cursive and replaced that standard with typing. According to the Wall Street Journal “Common Core’s backers have said cursive took a back seat to technology and skills like typing that children need in the modern world.”ⁱⁱ This change was done to prepare students for the modern world, and while some argue this is a good thing, it came at the expense of cursive—a critical part of a student’s education.

Assembly Bill 3 requires that cursive writing be a part of model academic standards for English language arts, something many states have already done. As of 2023, 21 states require some sort of cursive instruction. I believe it is time that Wisconsin schools restore the teachings of cursive in our classrooms in order to help our students with both reading and writing.ⁱⁱⁱ

According to a report published by the National Institute for Health an “optimal learning environment” in schools should include cursive handwriting.^{iv} Other reports state that cursive stimulates parts of the brain that process letters and that it helps students develop motor skills, hand-and-eye coordination, and memory.^v Typing has been proven to stimulate a different part of the brain than cursive, and should not be seen as a replacement.

Cursive also helps students better understand their past and gives them the ability to read historical documents such as the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights. While most older adults can read these important documents in their original format, many in our younger generations have not been taught cursive and thus struggle to read and comprehend these documents.

The U.S Department of Education recently published the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NEAP), and the results are troubling. In 2024, only 31% of fourth and eighth graders tested at or above proficiency levels, both down from 2022.^{vi} These scores are obviously

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concerning. Clearly our students are not learning how to read and write at the same level of achievement as past generations.

As stated earlier, 21 states already require that cursive be a part of their curriculum, Wisconsin should return our schools to that list.

I encourage you to support AB 3 and move our state forward with this small, but critical reform.

ⁱ<https://dpi.wi.gov/sites/default/files/imce/standards/pdf/ela-stds-app-a-revision.pdf>

ⁱⁱ<https://www.wsj.com/us-news/education/cursive-writing-letters-school-98fe7bfa>

ⁱⁱⁱ<https://www.edweek.org/teaching-learning/more-states-require-schools-to-teach-cursive-writing-why/2023/11>

^{iv}<https://pmc.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/articles/PMC7399101/>

^v<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/memory-medic/201308/biological-and-psychology-benefits-of-learning-cursive>

^{vi}<https://www.wpr.org/news/wisconsin-widest-gap-math-reading-white-black-students>



February 6, 2025

**Assembly Committee on Education
Department of Public Instruction Testimony
2025 AB 3 Incorporating Cursive Writing into State Standards**

The Department of Public Instruction (DPI) thanks Chair Kitchens and members of the Committee for the opportunity to share testimony on AB 3.

The DPI opposes AB 3 for the reasons outlined below.

DPI believes that each literacy learner deserves access to rigorous, engaging instruction and respects the statutory authority that public schools, school participating in the Choice program, and private schools have in making local decisions about instructional goals.

The DPI believes that the intention of this bill is to support the development of literacy proficiency. The DPI disagrees that this will be an outcome because while there have been studies on the impacts of cursive writing, no research consensus can be found to show widespread improvements in literacy achievement due to instruction in cursive writing, or an impact on memory. A short review of this research is provided after the testimony.

Further, we believe this bill is unnecessary since the 2020 Wisconsin's Standards for English Language Arts included the addition of cursive writing as one way for learners to demonstrate the ability to form letters for Kindergarten through Grade 6. These grade-level standards lead toward lifelong literacy, including the ability to make intentional choices about reading, writing, speaking, listening, and language to meet the changing literacy demands of a contemporary, democratic society. Cursive is specifically found in Writing standard 6 at each grade-level between kindergarten and grade 6. These standards were reviewed and revised with public and legislative input and drafted by a team of more than 50 Wisconsin educators. Additionally, the updated academic standards were approved by the State Superintendent's appointed Academic Standards Review Council, which included chairs from the Senate and Assembly Education Committees and a minority member from each of those committees. This bill would set a precedent for the legislature to impose, via statutory requirement, the inclusion of a specific skill already included in the model academic standards, privileging one literacy skill over the others.

AB 3 minimizes local control by placing a curricular requirement that schools and districts include cursive writing as part of each school or district's sequential curriculum plan. Many school districts already exercise local control to include the teaching of cursive in their curriculum without an unfunded state mandate. Local education agencies should continue to retain the

authority to include cursive writing as part of their local curriculum plan, to determine the instructional materials necessary, and to prioritize how they allocate valuable instructional time for learners and limited professional learning hours for educators. In those districts that currently do not choose to include instruction in cursive writing, there would be significant expenses for curriculum, materials, and professional learning for educators. This bill, therefore, would be adding local expenses for those districts. In addition, the bill includes no information about how proficiency in cursive writing would be assessed beyond stating that it must be legible, which is subjective.

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).

Beyond minimizing local control, the bill disregards the enormous efforts already being made throughout the state to bolster foundational literacy skills as a result of 2023 Wisconsin Act 20. Wisconsin districts and schools are focused on improving literacy outcomes by engaging in professional learning, adopting new curricula, administering assessments and delivering individualized instruction while collaborating with families and communities. Teaching cursive writing would require time for instruction and practice, which would draw time away from other instruction in core subject areas (reading, science, or social studies) and/or other school activities (such as lunch or recess). Wisconsin schools are already working diligently to ensure their staff and students have sufficient time and resources necessary to become proficient readers.

In order to advance literacy and promote flexible readers, writers, and thinkers, Wisconsin must remain focused on supporting the districts, schools, communities, and families who are already engaged in the heavy lifting of meaningful improvements with the implementation of 2023 Wisconsin Act 20.

Thank you for allowing DPI to share this testimony. Please direct any questions to Laura Adams, Policy Initiatives Advisor, at laura.adams@dpi.wi.gov.

What do we know about research conducted on this topic?

- More research is needed.
- **Suen (1983); Graham et al. (1998); Morales et al. (2014):** Research is inconclusive. For example, Suen (1983) found that children and adults wrote cursive faster than manuscript. However, Graham et al. (1998) found that students using a mixed handwriting style (manuscript and cursive) wrote faster than those using only one. Morales et al. (2014) found no significant differences in writing fluency and accuracy between manuscript and cursive.
- **Graham et al. (1998):** Reported most studies on cursive handwriting were conducted over 30 years ago, many dating back to the 1920s and 1930s.

What has research reported about the relationship between cursive and reading development?

- **Otto and Rarick (1969): Reported** that transitioning to cursive does not impact reading performance but does influence handwriting and spelling.
- **Wiley & Rapp (2021):** Found that handwriting supports learning and memory, but did not report cursive to be superior to manuscript.
- **Ray et al. (2021):** Reported strong evidence for the impact of letter writing fluency on writing composition, and letter name and sound knowledge but did not report on the influence of cursive handwriting.

What has research reported about cursive writing, writing fluency, and writing accuracy?

- **Morales et al. (2014):** Reported no significant difference in writing fluency and accuracy between manuscript and cursive.
- **Morales-Rando et al. (2022):** Reported that the utilization of cursive writing for sixth grade students did not offer an advantage for writing accuracy compared to manuscript writing.
- **Morin et al. (2012):** Reported that students who learned cursive exclusively wrote more slowly than those using manuscript or a mixed style.
- **Hendricks (1955) & Jackson (1970):** Reported that children and adults with similar instruction wrote at the same speed in both manuscript and cursive.

What has research reported about cursive writing and individual student differences?

- **Berninger & Wolf (2009):** Reported that cursive may help some students but disregards individual learning needs, especially for students with fine motor challenges.
- **Simmons et al. (2016):** Reported gender differences in cursive fluency, with female students improving more than males. Additionally, female students' print legibility decreased from fifth to sixth grade.

What has research reported about the timing of handwriting instruction?

- **Karlsdottir (1996):** Reported no definitive answer on when or if cursive should be introduced.
- **Otto and Rarick (1969):** Reported that transitioning to cursive at different times does not impact later reading performance.
- **Morales-Rando et al. (2022):** Reported that while cursive was impactful for 1st and 2nd graders, this advantage disappeared by 6th grade.

Strand: Writing Standards K-5

Overarching Statement: (Applies to all standards; informs instructional practice of educators.) Write routinely for a range of culturally-sustaining and rhetorically authentic tasks, purposes, and audiences over extended time frames (time for inquiry, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames.

Specific Grade-Level Standard; Writing Standard 6

W.K.6 With guidance and support from adults, explore a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Learn to produce writing through printing (including forming most printed upper- and lower-case letters), cursive, and/or typing.

W.1.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Learn to produce writing through printing (including forming most printed upper- and lower-case letters), cursive, and/or typing.

W.2.6 With guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Learn to produce writing through printing (including forming most printed upper- and lower-case letters), cursive, and/or typing.

W.3.6 With guidance and support from adults and peers, use digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Learn to produce writing through printing, cursive, and/or typing.

W.4.6 With some guidance and support from adults, use a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Learn to produce writing through printing, cursive, and/or typing (with sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of one page in a single sitting).

W.5.6 With some guidance and support from adults, they intentionally select a variety of digital tools to produce and publish writing, including in collaboration with peers. Proficiently produce writing through printing, cursive, and/or typing (with sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of two pages in a single sitting).



Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance

Feb. 6, 2025

Representative Kitchens and members of the Assembly Education Committee,

I am Cathy Olig, the executive director of the Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance (SWSA), which represents twenty-six public school districts serving approximately 180,000 students in southeastern Wisconsin.

I am writing to express our concerns with AB 3, 4, 5, and 6. While the proposals may have some merit they are matters of local control, and in some cases duplicative of what is already being done in schools. Further, the bills do not address the critical issues and needs of public school districts, which include:

- The increasing costs of special education services and a reimbursement rate that only covers 30% leave the remaining amount to come from a school district's general fund. This is often millions of dollars that a school district must transfer to provide federally mandated services that students need and deserve.
- Rising cost of doing business: increased costs for curriculum, student support needs, utilities, insurance, healthcare, transportation, food service, and wages. School districts are not immune to inflation, yet general school district revenues per pupil lag inflation by more than \$3300 since 2009. The current funding system is not sustainable.
- Advancing literacy and overall student achievement. Act 20 remains an unfunded mandate.
- Recruiting and retaining professional educators and support staff. All districts are experiencing staffing shortages in every single job category. Schools face increased labor costs in a competitive labor market, where it's common to see educators move districts at an increased rate or leave the profession entirely. This harms students and their learning.

The proposals do not help address any of the critical needs listed above. We are asking to work with you to develop sound education policy to support student achievement. Public schools need general, flexible, spendable revenue that keeps pace with inflation. Increasing special education funding to at least 60% reimbursement (sum sufficient) would provide more predictable, stable funding that supports all students due to less of a transfer from the school district's general fund.

We want to collaborate with you to help address immediate staffing needs and longer-term educator pipeline issues that all schools face. This would make a difference for all students in Wisconsin, regardless of what type of school they attend.





Southeastern Wisconsin Schools Alliance

While this letter expresses our concerns, we want to emphasize that we value the long-term relationships that SWSA districts have built with legislators. **How can we start working together to implement solutions that ensure all Wisconsin students have an exceptional education to build a strong future workforce?**

Please meet with your school district leaders to understand the state of public schools. We are happy to speak with you and want to work together to help support Wisconsin students and schools.

Sincerely,

Cathy Olig
Executive Director

