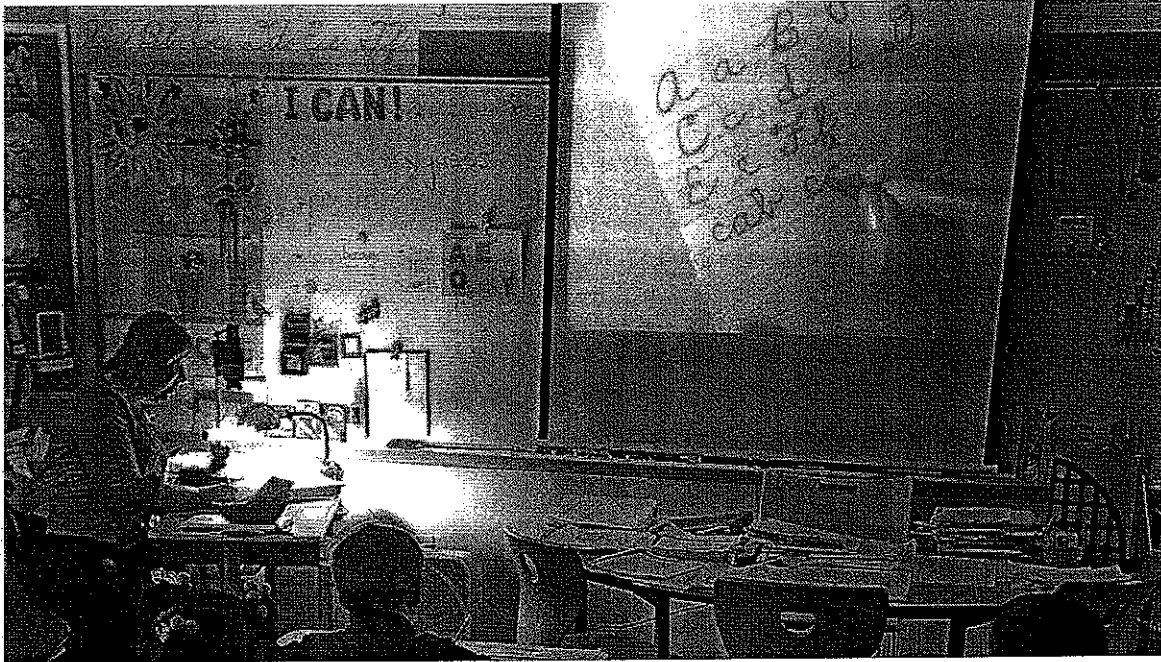


Some states say "write on" to cursive classes

By Associated Press, adapted by Newsela staff on 11.20.13

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Elaine Reid uses an overhead projector to teach cursive writing to her class at Cleveland PreK-6 School in Dayton, Ohio. In years gone by, penmanship helped distinguish the literate from the illiterate. But now, in the digital age, people are increasingly communicating by computer and smartphone. Photo: AP Photo/Al Behrman

COLUMBUS, Ohio — Linden Bateman is trying to keep cursive writing in American classrooms.

Cursive writing has long been a key part of good penmanship. And in the past good penmanship, or handwriting, was important.

But we now live in the digital age. People use computers and smartphones more and more. Handwriting often is not needed.

Not long ago, states came up with a list of the most important public school classes. This set of classes is known as the Common Core (<https://www.newsela.com/?tag=Common%20Core>).

Penmanship classes were dropped from the list.

Fancy Cursive Writing

But seven states have changed their mind. They are now bringing back cursive.

Bateman is just one supporter of cursive. He is 72 years old and works for the government in Idaho. He says cursive writing makes a person look smart. It also involves creativity. And it builds brain cells.

He hand-writes 125 letters each year. Using a fancy cursive, of course.

Children use more of their brain when they write cursive than when they keyboard, said Bateman. "We're not thinking this through. It's beyond belief to me that states have allowed cursive to slip from the standards."

Cursive was dropped from the Common Core for many different reasons. Children need to master computer keyboarding. And most grown-ups do not use cursive in everyday life. Instead, they use a mix of cursive and print.

Morgan Polikoff studies education. He says it is all about finding good jobs. Think about what skills will help students find good jobs in the future, he said. Keyboarding is more likely to help than cursive.

States are allowed to offer courses not on the Common Core list. But in many schools, classroom time is limited. And the pressure to get good grades is high. So courses that are not required usually get thrown out.

Reading, Writing And Thinking

That's why seven states are now making cursive required. These states are California, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Massachusetts, North Carolina and Utah.

People who support cursive say science backs them up. Studies show it improves reading, writing and thinking skills.

And, they say, we may have a big problem if people stop learning cursive: We won't be able to read important writing from the past. We will not be able to read our ancestors' letters and journals. Or many other important writings.

"The Constitution of the United States is written in cursive. Think about that," Bateman said.

Almost all U.S. teens use the Internet. And they send a lot of text messages: 60 a day on average.

But teachers do not think that's a bad thing. Most believe the Internet and cellphones make their students use their imaginations.

But that's not the whole story, says researcher Kristen Purcell. Most teachers "encourage their students to do at least some of their writing by hand."

Teachers gave two main reasons, she said. The first is that most tests still use paper and pencil. And writing by hand helps slow down students' thinking. This encourages deeper and fuller thinking as they write.

Many Teens Write On Computer

Many teens would rather write on the computer. They find it faster and neater. But many still use handwriting. They use it for notes, letters, journals, short stories or the words to songs — as well as for school.

"I find it hard to think creatively when I am typing," a high school boy from the Pacific Northwest said. "So I like to hand-write everything, then I put it on the computer. I don't know, that is just how I am."

People unable to write cursive might want to think about what happened to Jacob Lew. In 2013, President Barack Obama nominated him as treasury secretary. But there was a problem.

Lew's signature looked more like a bunch of loops than a name. And as treasury secretary, his signature would be on U.S. money.

"Jack assured me that he is going to work to make at least one letter" readable, Obama said at the time. That way, the president joked, he will not make our money worth less.