

SENATE BILL REPORT

SB 5238

As Reported by Senate Committee On:
Early Learning & K-12 Education, February 16, 2017

Title: An act relating to requiring that cursive writing be taught in common schools.

Brief Description: Requiring that cursive writing be taught in common schools.

Sponsors: Senators Warnick, Becker, Wellman, Rolfes, Zeiger, Angel, Chase, Hasegawa and Sheldon.

Brief History:

Committee Activity: Early Learning & K-12 Education: 1/30/17, 2/16/17 [DP, w/oRec].

Brief Summary of Bill

- Requires school district board of directors to incorporate curricula to teach cursive writing.

SENATE COMMITTEE ON EARLY LEARNING & K-12 EDUCATION

Majority Report: Do pass.

Signed by Senators Zeiger, Chair; Fain, Vice Chair; Rolfes, Ranking Minority Member; Rivers and Warnick.

Minority Report: That it be referred without recommendation.

Signed by Senator Mullet.

Staff: Ailey Kato (786-7434)

Background: Current state law requires all common schools to give instruction in handwriting. This law was last amended in 2013 when the Legislature passed a bill that amended statutes that were identified by the Code Reviser as using gender-specific terms and replaced those terms with gender-neutral terms. This resulted in penmanship being changed to handwriting. The implementing rule adopted by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction has not been updated and still requires school districts to provide instruction in penmanship. Neither penmanship nor handwriting is defined in the education title of the code.

This analysis was prepared by non-partisan legislative staff for the use of legislative members in their deliberations. This analysis is not a part of the legislation nor does it constitute a statement of legislative intent.

Summary of Bill: Cursive writing is included within the term handwriting. When a school district board of directors reviews or adopts its English Language Arts curriculum, it must incorporate curricula to teach cursive writing.

Appropriation: None.

Fiscal Note: Available.

Creates Committee/Commission/Task Force that includes Legislative members: No.

Effective Date: Ninety days after adjournment of session in which bill is passed.

Staff Summary of Public Testimony: PRO: If future generations are not taught cursive, they will not be able to read the founding fathers' handwritten documents. Cursive writing is a matter of identity protection. If a person cannot read or write cursive, there is a strong possibility that a fraudulent signature could be affixed to a document. Signatures should not be print letters because they should be unique. Cursive writing is an art form, and it is one way for students to develop their brain.

CON: If schools are mandated to teach something, it should be something that students use constantly in their daily lives. Cursive writing is not one of those things. Students can learn cursive on their own. Many of the important documents written in cursive have been typed, and the content is still the same. Reading a translation of a document written is not any less valid. Typing and programming are skills that students are actually using. Cursive writing can be more difficult to learn than manuscript.

OTHER: This state adopted the Common Core English Language Arts standards. These standards were adopted with the intent of preparing students for the 21st century global economy. Handwriting is already required, and research shows that one type of handwriting, whether cursive writing or block print, does not increase or enhance the skill of handwriting. Cursive writing curriculum is not the focus of the education publishing industry. Schools would likely have to reduce instructional time in other subjects in order to teach cursive writing. Keyboarding is a skill necessary for taking certain standardized tests.

Persons Testifying: PRO: Austin Freeman, Legislative Youth Advisory Council.

CON: McKenna Conlin, citizen; Aria Garrett, Legislative Youth Advisory Council.

OTHER: Aira Jackson, Director of English Language Arts and Literacy, Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction.

Persons Signed In To Testify But Not Testifying: No one.