

**MSC NAACP Testimony Supporting House Bill 725**  
***Education – Public Schools – Instruction in Print and Cursive Handwriting***

The Maryland State Conference NAACP strongly supports *HB725, Education – Public Schools – Instruction in Print and Cursive Handwriting*.

We have students in the State who can barely write their own names. In 2010, with the Common Core, many educational agencies across the country abandoned instruction in handwriting since the Common core didn't demand it. Accompanying this trend was the overuse and trust that technology such as tablets would eliminate the need for writing. There was never any real need to abandon instruction in handwriting, and this is a matter of equity. The research that supported writing was ignored, while those with a technology bend leaned on research that diminished the importance of cursive. As tragic fact, some districts appear to have just dropped handwriting because it was no longer being tested, which is a phenomenon not surprising. Also, one overlooked mitigating factor is that many students do not have computers at home. As a result, we end with students who lack technological skills, exacerbated by the fact that they can hardly write, if at all, their own names. The decision to remove handwriting was made by adults, most of whom already had the related skills themselves.

Thankfully some states have are returning to cursive and mandating handwriting curriculum, realizing the importance in the overall development of students. In this growing movement, there are currently fourteen states, including Texas, Virginia, Alabama, Tennessee, California, Indiana, Florida, etc. New York City schools, the largest in the nation, now requires cursive instruction. The language in the bill passed by the Ohio legislature succinctly expresses the mandate. Reflecting a trend, 14 states have approved such legislation. And in the fall of 2016, the nation's largest public school district, New York City schools, incorporated cursive writing in the curriculum for third graders. The New York Department of Education in its educator handbook states, "Evidence reveals an advantage for handwriting using pen and paper over keyboarding for students in grades 2 to 6 for amount written, rate of word writing, and number of ideas expressed." In all, there are twenty-one states that either under law or in instruction policy advocate the teaching of handwriting. However, the situation in some states is that while instruction in cursive writing may available or even advocated at the state level, it is often not yet fully mandated and left to the determination of the individual school system, leading to inherent inequities. Therefore, the MSC NAACP is asking passage of a similar bill as those of above states in Maryland.

By enhancing brain function, handwriting helps in increasing memory, thinking, and thus academic achievement. Brain research has shown that cursive writing enhances development of brain function that is not developed by basic reading. Cursive writing increases synchrony between left and right sides of the brain. In fact, research has shown that handwriting helps aids brain in development of reading skills. A 2012 study explored the effects the handwriting experience can have on functional brain development in pre-literate children. Researchers observed children, aged 0 months to 4 years old, as they wrote, traced or typed letters and shapes. The individuals were then shown images of the letters and shapes while the scientists

captured images of their brain from an MRI scan. The scientists discovered that handwriting was most effective for “recruiting components of the reading systems in the brain.”

The HB725 calls for instruction in handwriting as well as printing. The rationale here is that cursive writing requires a very different skill set from print. It involves using the hand muscles in a different way and activates a different part of the brain. Indiana University psychologist Karin James argues that practice in handwriting is needed for children to become effective readers. She gives two reasons for this assertion. First, learning-by-doing is far more effective than learning-by-seeing. This is because procedural learning always involves making connections between the sensory and motor areas of the brain that are recruited for the task.

Printing and writing increases students the connection psycho-motor skills, including fine motor skills. Sally Payne, head pediatric occupational therapist at the Heart of England NHS Foundation Trust “Children coming into school are being given a pencil but are increasingly not able to hold it because they don’t have the fundamental movement skills.” She said technology may be preventing children from developing the hand muscles they need to control and grip pencils.

In a brain-scanning study looking at the learning of cursive, children who were asked to handwrite cursive examples developed vision-hand connections in their brains, but those who just watched adults writing in cursive did not. Similarly, children who were educated to recognize letters by typing them on a keyboard didn’t develop vision-hand connections, even though the motor task of typing was involved. In short, learning letters by handwriting not only helps kids extract the essential features of letters, it’s also the only method that establishes brain connections essential to full literacy.

Handwriting also increases student memory of alphabet and form of letters. Cursive writing can also aid students with disabilities in better distinguish differences in letters. Research also suggests that fluent cursive helps students master writing tasks such as spelling and sentence construction because they don’t have to think as much about forming letters. Students equipped with cursive skill also have the benefit of enhancing their knowledge of history by being enabled to better read original documents and texts written in cursive, such as the *Declaration of Independence* and the *United State Constitution*.

Yes, the focus now is on technology. But we also must remember that there are many who continue to have complete life’s functions without the use of a keyboard. We want individuals to use the keyboard as another tool, not be bound by it due to lack of skills to do without it. Also, we do not want anyone dependent on a set to tools, while depleting their own magnificent human capacities.

In the past, the Maryland Legislature has been cited for its leadership in education. In that same vein, the Maryland State Conference NAACP asks that you support House Bill 725.