

**Department of Legislative Services**  
Maryland General Assembly  
2019 Session

**FISCAL AND POLICY NOTE**  
**First Reader**

Senate Bill 961 (Senator Jennings)(By Request)  
Education, Health, and Environmental Affairs

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**Education - Public Schools - Instruction in Print and Cursive Handwriting**

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This bill requires, beginning in the 2020-2021 school year, each local board of education to require each public elementary school to provide handwriting instruction that enables students to develop (1) legible print handwriting by the end of the third grade and (2) legible cursive handwriting by the end of the fifth grade. **The bill takes effect July 1, 2019.**

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**Fiscal Summary**

**State Effect:** None. The bill is directed at local school systems.

**Local Effect:** Local school systems can provide the required instruction using existing resources; however, resources and instruction time may be diverted from current activities.

**Small Business Effect:** None.

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**Analysis**

**Current Law:** With the advice of the State Superintendent of Schools, the State Board of Education (SBE) establishes basic policy and guidelines for the program of instruction for public schools. Subject to State law and the regulations, bylaws, policies, and guidelines established by SBE, each local board of education must establish the curriculum guides and courses of study for schools in its jurisdiction. Policies, rules, and regulations for the graduation of students from Maryland public schools are established by local boards of education and SBE.

## **Background:**

### *Maryland College and Career Ready Standards*

The Maryland State Department of Education advises that correct letter formation in print and cursive handwriting are expected skills under the Maryland College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS), which are the current State academic standards. MCCRS require that print be taught in kindergarten and grade 1 as part of the language strand. This expectation is found in the [MCCRS Framework – Language grades kindergarten through 2](#) (standard L1.a).

Cursive writing is an expected skill beginning in grade 2. It is listed under the essential skills and knowledge under each writing purpose in the [MCCRS Framework – Writing grades kindergarten through 2](#). Furthermore, in grades 3 through 5, students are asked to “apply cursive handwriting skills to produce neat and legible documents when handwriting is preferable or technology is unavailable.” This expectation is found in [MCCRS Framework – Writing grades 3 through 5](#).

The 2018-2019 school year is the sixth full year of implementation of the MCCRS for all students, in all 24 school systems. The MCCRS frameworks are not intended to convey the order in which the standards should be taught nor the length of time to devote to a unit of study.

### *Local Implementation*

Baltimore City Public Schools (BCPS) reports that print handwriting is currently part of daily instruction routine in kindergarten through grade 2 and embedded in the core curricula, through the Wit & Wisdom and Foundations curriculums. BCPS advises that cursive handwriting is not an explicit component of the current curriculum. Cursive was previously part of the foundational skills block in grade 3.

St. Mary’s County Public School (SMCPS) advises that print and cursive handwriting are taught; however, SMCPS does not specifically have curricular units or requirements in place for either print or cursive handwriting.

### *Other States*

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures bill tracker, as shown in **Exhibit 1**, 12 states currently have state laws that require cursive be taught. Indiana state law authorizes local school systems to include cursive writing in the curriculum and is currently considering a bill to make it a required part of the curriculum. In addition, 8 states are currently considering legislation to require cursive be taught. Maine recently

considered similar that would have required cursive. Some states also require a general curriculum that includes handwriting, which includes print handwriting. Further, state education agencies may require cursive taught in additional states through standards or regulations.

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**Exhibit 1**  
**Cursive Handwriting in Other States**

<b>Required</b>	<b>Optional</b>	<b>Considering</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alaska</li> <li>• Arkansas</li> <li>• California</li> <li>• Delaware</li> <li>• Illinois</li> <li>• Louisiana</li> <li>• Mississippi</li> <li>• New Hampshire</li> <li>• North Carolina</li> <li>• Ohio</li> <li>• South Carolina</li> <li>• Tennessee</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Indiana</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Minnesota</li> <li>• Missouri</li> <li>• New Jersey</li> <li>• New York</li> <li>• Pennsylvania</li> <li>• Rhode Island</li> <li>• Washington</li> <li>• West Virginia</li> </ul>

Note: Indiana state law authorizes local school systems to include cursive writing in the curriculum and is currently considering a bill to make it a required part of the curriculum. In addition, state education agencies may require cursive taught in additional states.

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures; Department of Legislative Services

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**Local Expenditures:** It is unclear to what extent local school systems will need to alter their curriculum to meet the requirements of the bill. As stated above, print and cursive handwriting are currently expected skills under the MCCRS framework. In addition, local school systems have the flexibility to implement the bill in the manner that best uses the resources available to their schools. Thus it is assumed that local school systems can include the instruction required by the bill using existing resources; however, resources and instruction time may need to be diverted from current activities.

BCPS advises that to reintroduce explicit cursive handwriting instruction to the elementary curriculum will require 15 to 30 minutes daily, which is 45 to 90 hours of instruction time per school year. BCPS further advises that curricular materials would need to be purchased.

## **Additional Information**

**Prior Introductions:** None.

**Cross File:** None.

**Information Source(s):** Maryland Association of Counties; Maryland State Department of Education; Baltimore City Public Schools; St. Mary's County Public Schools; National Conference of State Legislatures; Department of Legislative Services

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