

CURSIVE HANDWRITING INSTRUCTION

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House Bill 4483 (H-1) as reported from committee

Sponsor: Rep. Brenda Carter

1st Committee: Education

2nd Committee: Ways and Means

Complete to 7-22-20

Analysis available at
<http://www.legislature.mi.gov>

BRIEF SUMMARY: House Bill 4483 would amend the Revised School Code to require the Michigan Department of Education (MDE) to develop or adopt, and make available to public schools, a model program of instruction on cursive as a type of penmanship.

FISCAL IMPACT: The bill would create a cost increase for the state and may increase costs for districts, PSAs, or ISDs that choose to incorporate the model program of instruction on cursive.

THE APPARENT PROBLEM:

Generally, since the Common Core standards were introduced in 2010, omitting handwriting and cursive from the list of standards students are expected to reach by each grade, those skills have been offered less in schools. Some trace the decline as far back as 2005 in connection with increased access to computers.

However, in recent years, some states have reversed that trend. Illinois began requiring at least one unit on cursive writing in 2018-2019.¹ By July of 2019, Ohio required its Department of Education to include handwriting instruction materials in its model curriculum.² And beginning in the 2019-2020 school year, Texas began requiring students to be able to write legibly in cursive by the time they reach fifth grade.³ Beginning with a resurgence in 2016, in April of 2019 at least eighteen states had instituted some requirements regarding cursive instruction.

THE CONTENT OF THE BILL:

By August 1, 2020, MDE would have to develop or adopt, and make available to schools, a model program for cursive instruction.

Then, beginning with the 2020-2021 school year, the board of a school district or intermediate school district (ISD) or the board of directors of a public school academy (PSA, or charter school) could incorporate the model program in its schools' curriculum.

Proposed MCL 380.1164c

¹ <http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/fulltext.asp?DocName=&SessionId=91&GA=100&DocTypeId=HB&DocNum=2977&GAID=14&LegID=&SpecSess=&Session=>

² https://nxsTRIB-com.go-vip.net/wp-content/uploads/sites/12/2019/04/hb58_08_en.pdf

³ <http://ritter.tea.state.tx.us/rules/tac/chapter110/ch110a.html>

FISCAL INFORMATION:

The bill would create a cost increase for the state and may increase costs for districts, PSAs, or ISDs that choose to incorporate the model program of instruction on cursive.

MDE would incur costs to develop or adopt a model program of instruction on cursive. MDE estimates that the cost of either developing or adopting a program would equal around \$132,000. In addition, MDE estimates ongoing administrative costs of \$22,000 for 0.4 FTEs.

A district, PSA, or ISD that chooses to incorporate the program may incur costs for materials, for teacher training, and, if the program is not developed by MDE, for purchasing the program. However, districts, PSAs, and ISDs are not required to incorporate the program.

ARGUMENTS:

For:

Proponents advanced the bills as a way for students to retain connections with primary documents. After all, the nation's founding documents were written in cursive, as were other important writings throughout history. Children of today may go to the National Archives and view the Declaration of Independence and U.S. Constitution but, without a foundation in cursive handwriting, they are unable to read the documents. Likewise, they are unable to read letters and records of family history because the traditional expression of the alphabet is as foreign to them as another language. Losing the ability to read and write in cursive would also mean the loss of those important documents from any relevance or use.

Against:

Already, children of today are bombarded with the many concepts and ideas they must master in order to function in an ever-evolving world. An increasing emphasis on higher education, rapidly progressing technology, and ambitious standards that children must meet all mean that every moment spent at school is valuable and must be treated as such. Almost all expression today is done on computers, and so, by a certain grade level, students move from hand-writing their work to typing it. Cursive is simply not essential for excelling in schooling or careers and has no place in a modern schoolroom. If parents value cursive handwriting for sentimental reasons, they may teach their children how to use it; however, the function of schools is to prepare students for college and careers, and cursive instruction does nothing to further those goals.

POSITIONS:

Representatives of the following entities testified in support of the bill (2-25-20):

The Handwriting Collaborative
Oakland Schools
Zaner-Blosser

The following entities indicated support for the bill:

Michigan Association of School Boards (7-22-20)

Michigan Education Association (2-25-20)

Middle Cities Education Association (2-25-20)

Michigan Association of Superintendents & Administrators (3-3-20)

The Michigan Department of Education indicated opposition to the bill in the absence of funding. (7-22-20)

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■ This analysis was prepared by nonpartisan House Fiscal Agency staff for use by House members in their deliberations, and does not constitute an official statement of legislative intent.