(taken from EECD’s 4-6 Guide Revision March 2014)

**Cursive Writing**

One aspect which may affect writing fluency is the ease with which a student can write their thoughts and ideas down. The central focus of cursive writing is on communication which is enhanced with facility, speed and ease. The purpose of students learning cursive writing skills is to broaden their range of written expression to serve them throughout life. While some students will continue to print and many will use available technologies, cursive writing remains an effective tool in some situations, and especially in the larger global context.

Douglas Reeves, in the American School Board Journal, agrees with the need to continue to teach cursive writing:

“By diminishing handwriting, we diminish student confidence and fluency in writing,” he argues. And when we diminish student writing we risk catastrophic consequences for student skills in reading comprehension, math, science, social studies, and interpersonal communication. Just as skills in keyboarding, Web design, and oral communication open the door of opportunity for students, so do handwriting skills. Students need multiple methods of communication in the 21st century. Each of these skills requires the care and attention of teachers, parents, and students.”

He also suggests that fluency in handwriting supports fluency in thinking and communicating. Certainly handwriting is a skill that is worthy of our attention and **it is recommended that every school develop a school wide plan for the instruction and practice of cursive writing.**

Students will require explicit instruction and directed practice to build neural pathways of effective letter formation to enhance speed, ease and, ultimately, legibility, an essential courtesy to the reader. It is appropriate to begin to focus on cursive writing instruction and practice in the grade 3 year.

Cursive writing instruction and practice most often results in the development of an effective communication tool, but time devoted to development of this skill is not considered part of the writing workshop. Short, frequent sessions are best suited to cursive writing instruction and practice. After teachers feel that students have control of correct letter formations, explicit instruction lessens, while monitoring individuals by observing as they practice and responding with descriptive feedback increases.

Explicit instruction of cursive writing includes:

* Whole class instruction generally, with the teacher providing individualized attention as necessary
* Students having a separate scribbler for cursive writing practice
* Directed practice generally consists of copying letters, words and sentences
* In the early stages of instruction, students may benefit from making the letter formations in large motor formations – in the air, on individual white boards, other students’ backs, etc.
* The following components of cursive writing are taught in order: correct letter formation, uniform letter size and uniform letter size (within the text)

Commercial programs with special pages and workbooks are not necessary for effective cursive handwriting instruction and practice. More importantly, students need instruction that is characterized by:

* Instruction that includes both verbal explanation and visual demonstrations
* Descriptive feedback that highlights both strengths and needs
* Students actually copy letter formations from models, rather than tracing them
* Observing students as they practice to ensure that they are practicing effective formations
* Ensuring that writing workshop time is not used for this purpose
* Developing appropriate next steps for each student
* Instruction and practice experiences that present letters in groupings that have similar formations rather than in alphabetical order
* Opportunities for students to talk about letter formations – how letter formations share similar characteristics, are different, groupings, etc.
* Opportunities for students to assess their own successes and challenges

Cursive handwriting is another area where school-wide planning plays a vital role in the delivery of an effective regimen of instruction and expectations. Teachers need to decide when instruction will begin, when it will be reinforced, expected, etc. What follows are two examples of a school plan for cursive writing instruction.

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| **Example 1: A school-wide plan to address cursive writing instruction** | | |
| **Grade** | **Writing focus** | **Reading focus** |
| grade 3 | * introduction to cursive handwriting * explicit instruction (mini-lessons) * a few short practice sessions to explicitly practice the formation of letter * many, incidental opportunities throughout the week to purposefully practice cursive handwriting such as: writing their name on their work, writing the date on their daily work, writing short notes | * the teacher models reading cursive writing and encourages students to participate * reading short messages written in cursive writing in a supported situation |
| grade 4  September to December | * some explicit instruction as needed (mini-lessons) * continued practice throughout the week in such situations as writing homework in the planner, writing the date, writing short notes * occasional expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task | * the teacher models reading cursive writing and encourages students to participate * reading short messages written in cursive writing in a supported situation |
| grade 4  January to June | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task and as opportunities naturally arise * Continue to expect cursive writing in writing homework or short notes home * Encourage the use of cursive writing in the writing of short notes | * Continue to read cursive writing that is posted on classroom boards and charts * short practice sessions reading cursive writing – when the occasion naturally arises in the classroom |
| grade 5 | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task in the normal course of the class * write the word of the day in cursive writing and printing * write the date and occasional directions in cursive writing | * write in cursive writing when brainstorming or any time when you are supporting the readers * increased expectations for reading cursive writing that is posted |
| grade 6 | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task | * increased expectations for reading cursive writing that is posted |

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| **Example 2: A school-wide plan to address cursive writing instruction** | | |
| **Grade** | **Writing focus** | **Reading focus** |
| grade 3 | * introduction to cursive handwriting * explicit instruction (mini-lessons) * short practice sessions several times weekly |  |
| grade 4  September to December | * explicit instruction (mini-lessons) * continued practice several times weekly * transitioning to increased cursive writing expectations * occasional expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task |  |
| grade 4  January to June | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task | * introduction to reading cursive writing that is posted on classroom boards and charts * short practice sessions reading cursive writing – several times weekly in a variety of subject areas |
| grade 5 | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task | * short practice sessions several times weekly in a variety of subject areas * increased expectations for reading cursive writing that is posted |
| grade 6 | * increased expectations in written work, as appropriate to students and task | * increased expectations for reading cursive writing that is posted |

Through the Program Planning Process, it may be determined that students with special needs will require assistive technology to support written communication. Although some students may find cursive handwriting skills particularly difficult to develop, teachers will need to determine if excluding them from instruction and practice opportunities may affect their self-esteem and motivation. Considerations for these students may include:

* plain, unruled paper
* wide ruled paper to provide additional space for letter formation
* practicing formations, but not be expected to cursive write in their written work
* allowing these students to use keyboarding instead of handwriting