

Response

Recommendation: Teach cursive writing in grade 3 as embedded in "Fountas and Pinnell Classroom" phonics lessons and outlined in the "The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum" section on writing.

Rational: "The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy Continuum: A Tool for Assessment, Planning and Teaching, Prek-8" has been used by Worcester Public Schools teachers for many years and was initially provided through the Benchmark Assessment (BAS) training. This teacher tool is used as a guide regardless of the core literacy program in place. In the most recent addition, the section on the Writing Continuum states: "This writing continuum is presented in a one-year span, the goals ideally achieved by the end of the grade" (p.227) and "The writer's handwriting must be legible. Effective handwriting also increases writing fluency and ease, so the writer can give more attention to the message. For the same reason, it is important for students to develop rapid, efficient keyboarding skills." (p. 235). The goals for grade 3 under handwriting and word processing include: "Write fluently in both manuscript and cursive handwriting with appropriate spacing" and "Use efficient keyboarding skills".

The Worcester Public Schools adopted "Fountas and Pinnell Classroom" for grades kindergarten through two in 2018-2019. Implementation is in the second year and professional development continues. The District will move to adopting the grade 3 program for the 2020-2021 school year. In the program, cursive writing is embedded into the phonics lessons with the goal of mastery by year end. This goal exceeds the state standard requirement for cursive writing as it recognizes the need to explicitly teach and utilize a variety of strategies to meet the needs of diverse learners. Key to this resource is that it does not require more time to teach cursive writing because it is embedded in the core instructional program through the phonics lessons. The teaching, practice and expectation of the development of efficient keyboarding skills will also remain and be supported through the integration of technology use in classroom instruction.

Current Research: While the research on manuscript, cursive writing, and keyboarding are not definitive, there is agreement that, like reading, handwriting and letter formation need to be taught directly. When this is not done, students often form letters with inefficient movement patterns which may lead to reversals with manuscript and a slow, labored process with manuscript or cursive. Legibility often becomes an issue. Keyboarding also needs to be taught directly for efficiency in communicating. Teaching all three forms of written communication is in line with Universal design for learning (UDL), a framework to improve and optimize learning for all students by utilizing methods that can be customized and adjusted to meet individual needs.