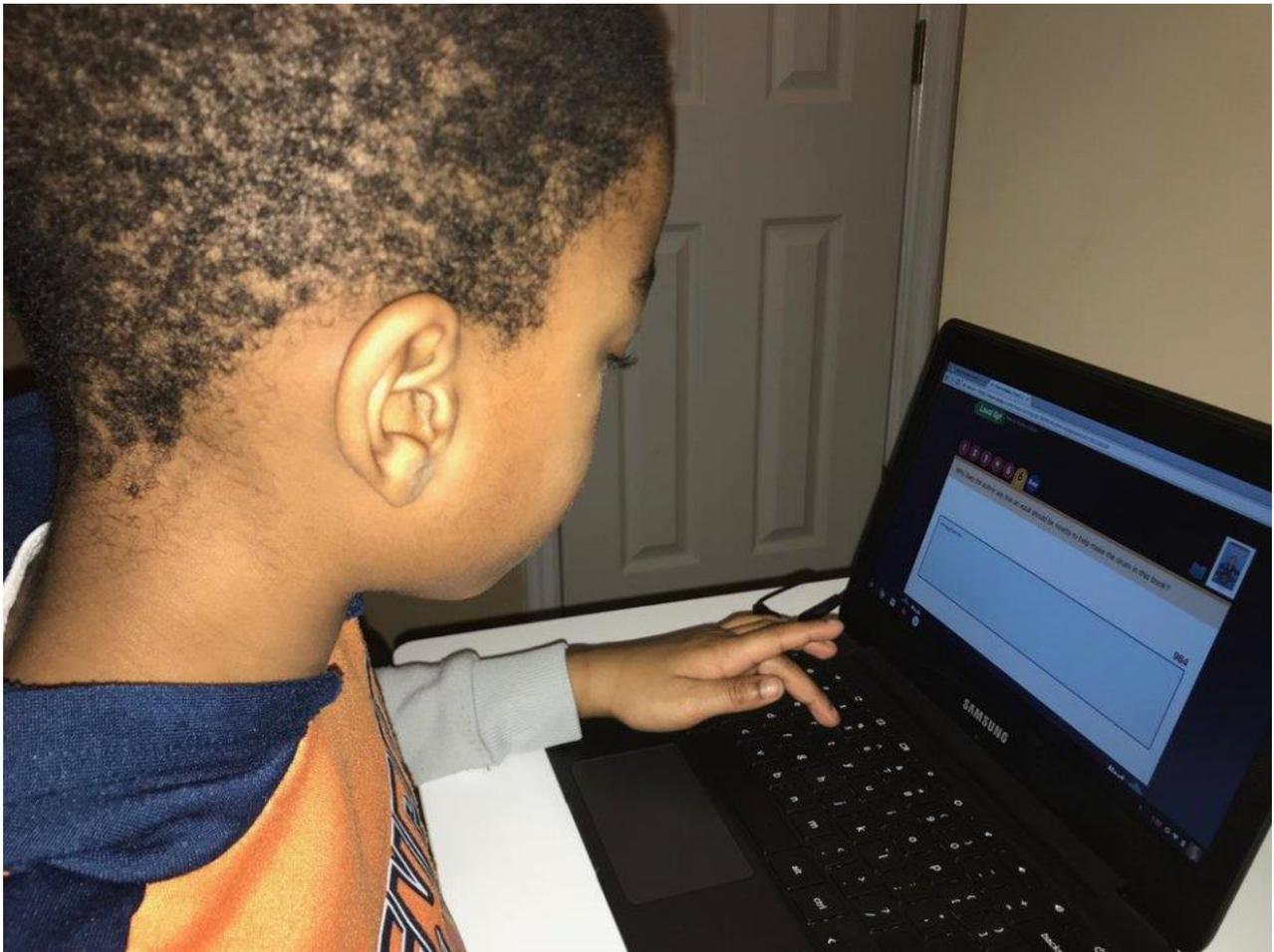


Do We Need to Mandate Cursive Writing or Should We Mandate Keyboarding Instead?

By Shawnta S. Barnes - January 6, 2018



JB completing an online reading assessment.

For several years, State Senator Jean Leising, R-Oldenburg, has introduced a bill that would mandate teaching cursive writing in elementary schools. Currently, teaching cursive writing is a local decision. Many schools

state they are preparing students for the 21st century and helping them become global digital citizens. Whether we like it or not, technology is embedded in our society and is integrated into our schools. Do students need to learn the skill of cursive writing to be ready for the future or should we mandate keyboarding instruction instead?

People in support of teaching cursive writing typically state these three arguments:

1. Students won't be able to sign their names on documents when they become adults.
2. Students won't be able to read historical documents written in cursive writing.
3. Students in other states are taught cursive writing.

To address the first argument, we need to assess how we are currently accepting signatures, which is merely a way to state you agree to something. There are ways to signify your agreement without using cursive writing. Yes, signatures on paper are accepted, but digital signatures in print are also used. I have signed documents digitally where I was asked to type in my name or initials to show I agreed to the terms written. Finally, do we need to carve out precious time in the curriculum to teach the entire cursive alphabet when students only need to know how to write their names in cursive print? When I attended elementary school, I had one teacher who required us to write our assignments in cursive. A teacher would have an uphill battle to refuse to accept assignments in today's schools that are written in print and not in cursive.

There is not much to say to counter the historical document argument. When people think about historical documents, they typically think about the historical documents written by the Founding Fathers. Guess what? All of those records are available in print form. Furthermore, the cursive alphabet is not so drastically different from print. Yes, the letter z could be tricky to figure out, but students' education will not be impeded whether they can read cursive or not.

The last argument, the good ol' bandwagon appeal – we should mandate cursive because other states have done it. According to an article published by *Indy Star*, Sen. Leising stated, “Now there are 23 states that have done it legislatively or through their state board of education. There are 14 states that are in some form of trying to mandate it in their states.” Cursive writing is mandated in less than half of the 50 states, and 13 states aren't even thinking about passing bills at all. How long have these 14 states been trying to mandate it? They could be just like Indiana where you have a Senator attempting to pass a bill that has failed time and time again.

When we are thinking about passing a bill to mandate action in the classroom, we need to think about the long-term impact. I believe the need is greater for keyboarding skills. Indiana, along with other states, has moved state assessments online. In addition to state assessments, students complete other assessments and class assignments online where they are required to type. Some of these assessments are timed. It is painful to watch students type their answers under a time limit using the two-finger peck typing method.

As a parent, if my sons' school teaches them cursive writing, great, but if it is not taught, that's okay. To be frank, my sons need to learn how to type even though they are in first grade. The reading program the school has us use at home requires them to answer open-ended writing prompts if you are reading at a certain level. Not only do I get to witness peck typing at the school where I teach, but I also get to watch it at home.

We ask schools to do a lot and we should only issue a mandate if there is going to be a great benefit to students. I'm not convinced a mandate is needed here; the decision should remain a local decision. If parents want their children to learn cursive writing, they can make this known to their children's school and school board or they can teach them how to write just their signature or the entire cursive alphabet at home. If we are going to give mandated tests and have them given online, students need to know how to type to ensure there are no barriers for them to show what they know. Since computers and technology are part of our modern lives including jobs, it would be more beneficial to pass a mandate for keyboarding instead of

cursive writing...if lawmakers just have to find another thing to mandate in our schools.