



NJSBA Position Statement **EXPRESSING CONCERNS / SEEKING AMENDMENT**

Assembly Bill No. 3865

(Reynolds-Jackson / Speight)

Requires public schools to include instruction on cursive handwriting.

The New Jersey School Boards Association (NJSBA), a federation of all of the state's local boards of education, appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback and **express concerns** on A-3865 in its current form. As introduced, this legislation requires a board of education to include instruction on how to read and write in cursive for students in grades kindergarten through five. **For the reasons set forth below, the NJSBA respectfully requests that the bill either bill held or amended to remove the mandate to provide cursive instruction and instead make it permissive at the local level.**

The NJSBA believes that the authority for management of public schools should rest with local boards of education and State authority over school districts should not exceed the scope necessary to fulfill the constitutional mandate for a thorough and efficient system of free public education. The NJSBA further believes that neither the state nor federal government should mandate any new or expanded school curricula, activity, or program unless a compelling need, including its educational value, has been demonstrated.

The NJSBA appreciates the sponsors' intention with this legislation. Our Association does not dismiss the potential benefits learning and mastering cursive handwriting can have on students' cognitive development and literacy skills. We know there is research confirming these benefits. However, after careful analysis and thought, combined with the fact that approximately 15 years have lapsed since cursive was eliminated as a state-level requirement, the NJSBA believes that any decision to provide cursive instruction should be a local one.

It is our contention that determinations over what should be taught in our public schools should be left to the purview of local boards of education, the NJ Department of Education and State Board of Education. Every five years, the NJDOE and State Board of Education conduct a comprehensive review, with the input of the public and educational professionals, of the state's learning standards and decide what should be included, revised or omitted. As a result of that process, cursive was eliminated as a requirement in 2010 when the state adopted the Common Core State Standards after thoughtful deliberation and stakeholder feedback. Since then, some school districts have decided to maintain cursive, while others have eliminated it. Districts do not take decisions such as these lightly, but they recognize that there are only so many hours in the school day and that occasionally some items must be removed from the curriculum to make time and resources available for others.

As strong proponents of local control, which has served NJ's educational system well, we believe that absent any affirmative obligation in the state's learning standards, districts should maintain the authority over whether to require cursive or not. Should this bill move forward, boards of education could be forced

to eliminate other components of the curriculum that they highly value, to the potential detriment of students. Therefore, while we applaud the sponsors for spotlighting the value of cursive instruction, the NJSBA is unable support this proposed mandate. We encourage the Legislature to explore other ways to raise awareness of the positive benefits of cursive, which could lead to calls from stakeholders (i.e., students, parents, board members, school staff) throughout local communities for it to be added to district curricula.

Thank you for your consideration of the NJSBA's position on this important matter. Any questions or comments may be directed to Jonathan Pushman, NJSBA Senior Director of Advocacy, at jpushman@njsba.org or (609) 278-5248.